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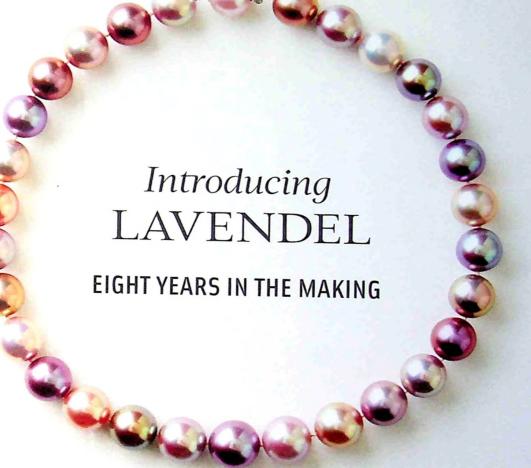
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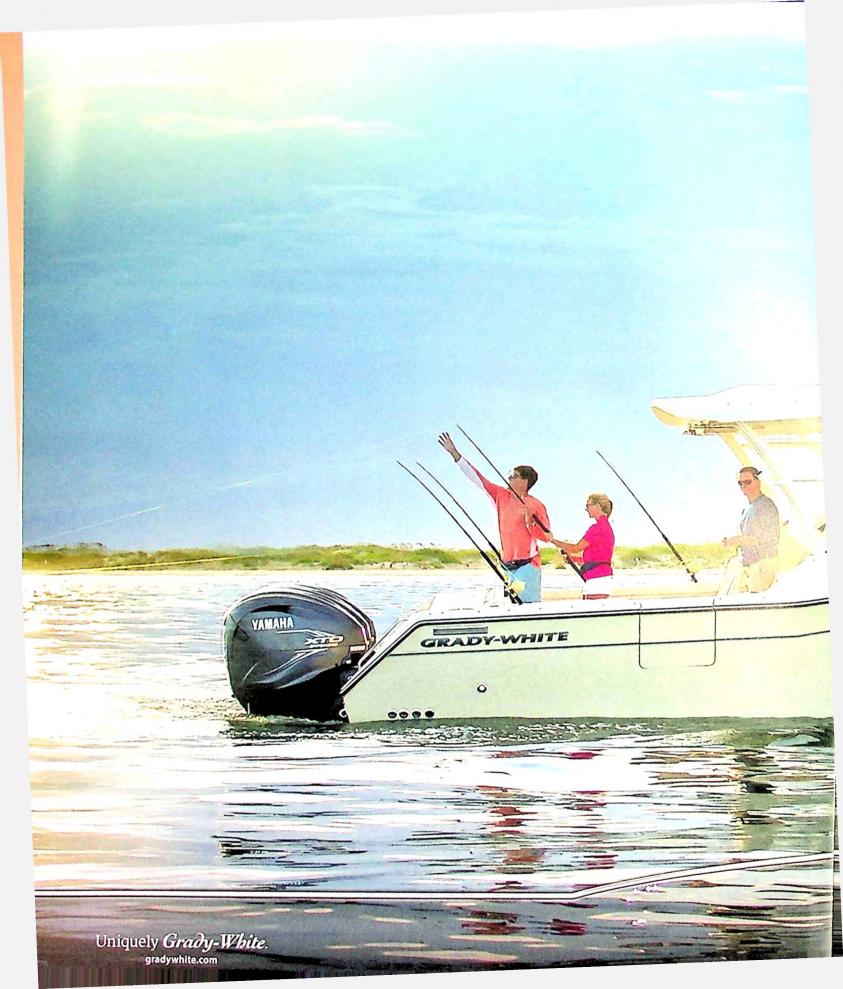




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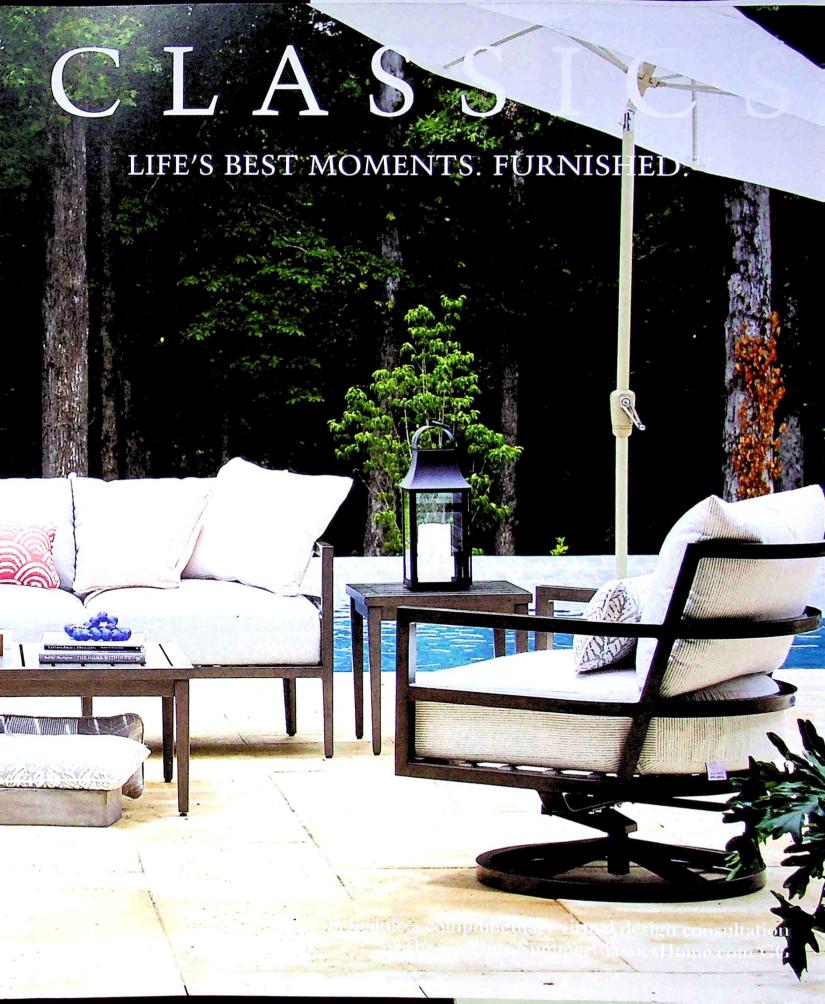
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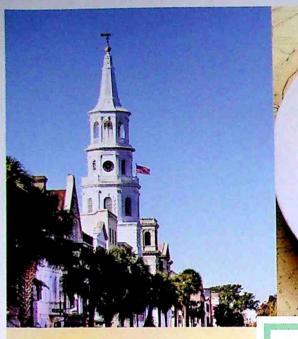
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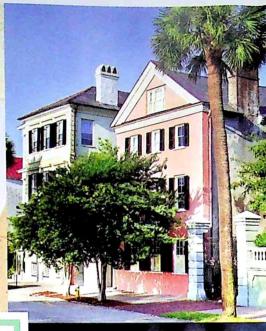
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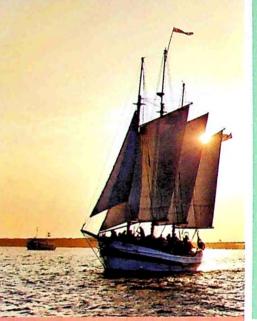
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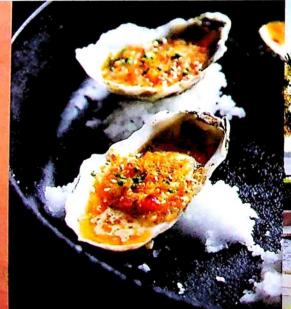


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Tamara Butler

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE AVERY RESEARCH CENTER FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

AS THE ESTEEMED INSTITUTION'S NEW DIRECTOR, DR. TAMARA BUTLER USES HER OWN LOWCOUNTRY ROOTS TO ILLUMINATE CHARLESTON'S BLACK HISTORY AND CULTURE

hough her academic career has taken her all over the country, Dr. Tamara Butler has always felt a pull toward the Lowcountry. "I'm from Johns Island, and we're good at knowing our history," she says. While earning her master's and her PhD, Butler was drawn to conversations about documenting the histories of Black communities, particularly those of the Gullah Geechee culture she grew up in. "Everywhere I went, I found I still wanted to talk about home," she says.

When the executive director role opened at the College of Charleston's Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, Butler felt that familiar pull once again. A former school, Avery has been a hub for Charleston's African American community since 1865, today encompassing an archive, a library, and a museum. "At first I didn't think Iwas qualified," she admits. "But I knew how hard it would be to see the position go to someone who didn't truly know our community." With unanimous committee support, Butler was named director in August of 2020.

"Whether they're searching for family roots or researching civil rights work, we're often the first place people start," Butler says. "What resonates with me most is having the ability to connect them with the right resources." Among her many duties, the director is especially passionate about strengthening African American narratives in the classroom. "I've always had a heart for educators, so helping them better tell the stories of Black South Carolinians brings me so much joy," she says.

Beyond the college campus, Butler urges visitors to venture off the beaten path. "I'm always telling students to drive out and see the Sea Islands," she says. While Johns Island's Angel Oak Tree is a worthy sight, "there are also so many beautiful Black historical sites that we tend to forget," she adds. Her itinerary includes stops at the Hebron St. Francis Center, Johns Island's oldest Black Presbyterian church; and the Walnut Hill Schoolhouse, once a school for formerly enslaved peoples. A meal at one of the area's Black-owned restaurants is another must. Butler recommends a trip to Nigel's Good Food in North Charleston, where bowls of award-winning gumbo and Butler's own favorite dish, the baked salmon, await.

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A pit stop on Florida's Cape San Blas

in a restored Road Towed trailer and a 1994 Land Rover Defender 90. Photograph by Gately Williams. Dress by Campo Collection, available at Garden & Gun's Fieldshop (ggfieldshop.com).

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Florida and International Territories: Account Director Maria Coyne 305-756-1086, mecoyne@mecoyneinc.com
Midwest: Account Director Tanya Scribner 214-734-6310, tanya@scribmedia.com
Northeast: Account Director Tiffany Lo 917-653-3939, tlo@gardenandgun.com
Southeast: Account Director Jana Robinson 678-399-3302, jana@robinsonmedia.net
Southwest: Account Directors Ellen Lewis, Michael Stafford 972-960-2889,
ellen@lewisstafford.com, michael@lewisstafford.com
West Coast: Account Director Jay Monaghan 415-777-4417, jay@monaghanmedia.com

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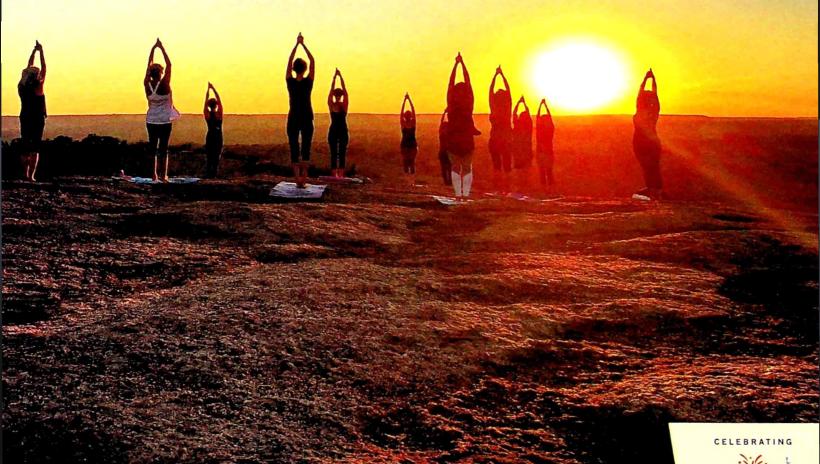
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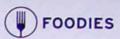


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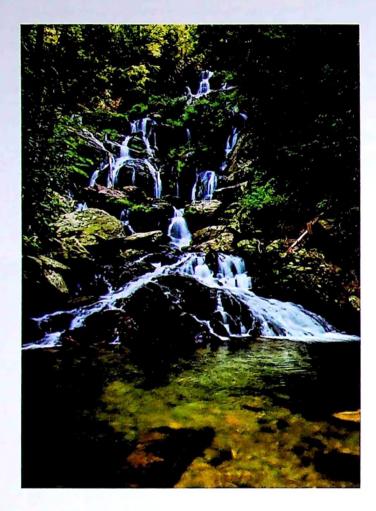
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Asheville Calling

REMEMBERING THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP-AND LOOKING AHEAD TO NEW ADVENTURES

n the autumn of 2001, I gave myself an enviable assignment. I hit the road for four months to follow the fall migration of the striped bass from Maine to North Carolina. The migration is a natural spectacle (and a fisherman's dream), as tens of millions of stripers course down the coast to their wintering grounds, accompanied by whales, freewheeling birds, and baitfish on the run. I left New York City, where I lived at the time, in an SUV loaded with fishing gear, a tent, waders, a wet suit (for free diving), a kayak on the rack, and a notebook filled with names and numbers of folks I planned

The hundred-foot Catawba Falls near Old Fort, North Carolina, just east of Asheville.

to meet with along the way. Soon I was setting my alarm clock to the rhythm of the tides and the pulse of the bite.

As with any road trip, there were many highs and some lows. Hearned of the World Trade Center attack on September II while sitting in the parking lot of a Laundromat in Portland, Maine, waiting for a load of clothes to dry. At that moment I nearly pulled the plug on the entire endeavor, a quest for fish suddenly seeming so trivial. But it turned out the water was one place folks looked to for a salve during the aftermath, including me, so I pushed on. In December I found myself on a motel balcony on the Outer Banks overlooking the vast Atlantic. The fish were out there, but the world would never be the same. That adventure would become my first book, On the Run: An Angler's Journey Down the Striper Coast.

In more recent years my road trips have become far less ambitious and usually involve my kids and a couple of dogs. And with the end of the pandemic in sight, my family and I are aching to hit the highway. The kids love St. Augustine, Florida, and my wife, Jenny, has Sanibel Island on her list, but we've all agreed that Asheville, North Carolina, will be our first destination. Besides planning to hit a trout stream, I've enlisted senior editor CJ Lotz, G&G's resident Asheville expert, to inform our trip. She delights in touring the grounds of Biltmore, slipping off into the greenhouse,

where orchids hold sway, or ogling the rose garden. As for hikes, she says, Asheville is basically your oyster, whether you're after waterfalls, scenic overviews, or lush greenery. In town we won't miss Malaprop's, one of the South's finest independent bookstores, or East Fork for pottery. We'll cap the day with dinner at the Market Place and a stop by the Grey Eagle, a pillar of Asheville's bustling music scene. As my kids would say: Are we there yet?

DAVID DIBENEDET TO

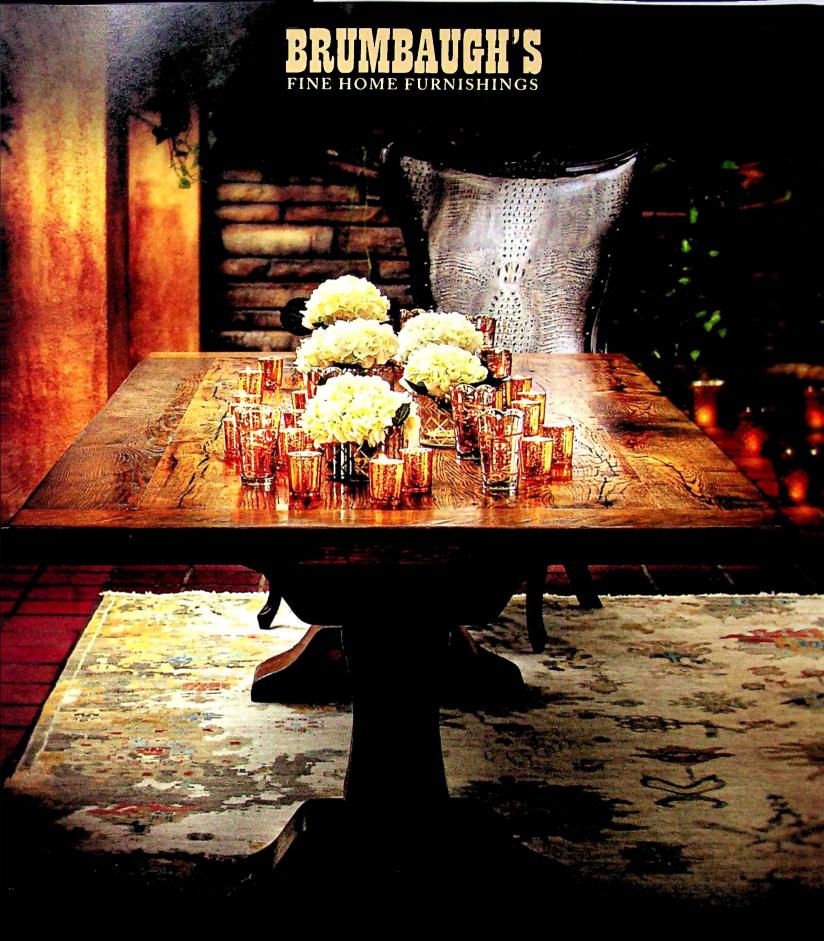
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Come On In

A new must-stop in Kentucky

If you happen to find yourself anywhere near Louisville, Kentucky, this summer, be sure to check out the new Garden & Gun Club at the historic Stitzel-Weller Distillery. Walking into the cozy cocktail bar, you'll feel as if you just stepped into the pages of the magazinethat is, if the magazine could hand you an old-fashioned or a Paper Plane and offer you plenty to nosh on, from pimento cheese to charcuterie plates to a howl of boiled peanuts. It's my kind of place.



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Robert Earl Keen

"People start clapping as soon as it starts and sing along with every chorus," says the Texas-born singer-songwriter Robert Earl Keen of his 1994 hit "Gringo Honeymoon." "Fans always want to know the backstory." He delivers the goods on the song's origins in "Southern Roads" (p. 103). As a touring musician with nineteen records, Keen is a road-trip authority. His favorite parts? "The first hour on the road and the first hour after arriving at the destination-anything and everything is possible." This summer, he's rereleasing Western Chill, an hourlong behind-the-scenes video recorded last year at his Snake Barn Movie Ranch Studios in Medina, Texas.

"Fans always want to know the backstory"

-Robert Earl Keen on the true tale behind his song "Gringo Honeymoon" (p. 103)



Pam Houston

WRITER

New Orleans was a worthy starting point for the trip Pam Houston conjures in "Southern Roads" (p. 103). "I could spend weeks there walking the neighborhoods, talking to whoever shows up next to me on a bench, on the streetcar, or at the French Truck Coffee," she says. Houston lives in Colorado, where she teaches and raises Icelandic sheep and Irish wolfhounds. Last year, she released her seventh book. Air Mail. a compilation of letters between her and the environmentalist Amy Irvine. "When we put them all together, they became a kind of hope howl to other women like us who believe in preserving the beauty of the natural world."



Winnie Au

PHOTOGRAPHER

When Winnie Au prepares for a celebrity photo shoot, she watches interviews of her subjects to get a feel for their personalities. Jon Batiste was exactly the way she had imagined. "You can tell from his music that he's joyous," says the Brooklyn-based photographer, who traveled to the musician's home to capture his melodica collection (p. 75), "The moment we walked in the door, he was singing and dancing." Au has photographed for the New York Times and People, and her pictures of canines wearing "cones of shame" helped raise funds for rescue dogs. Up next, she's working on a series of dog-friendly city guides.



Jessica B. Harris

WRITER

"It's my favorite Southern road trip," says Jessica B. Harris of the journey she's taken repeatedly from Memphis to Oxford, Mississippi (p. 103). Harris last traveled those roads in the spring of 2019. "It wasn't too long ago, but it feels like another life," she says. The culinary historian and James Beard Lifetime Achievement Award recipient has been quarantining in her home in Brooklyn. "I'm dreaming of going to Paris when all this is over," she says. "But first I need to go to my other home in New Orleans." In late May, Netflix debuts Harris's four-part documentary on African American food, High on the Hog.

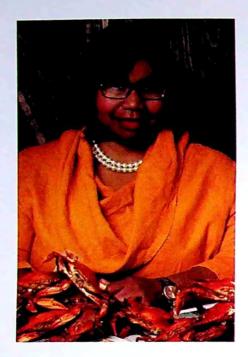


Derik **Hobbs**

ILLUSTRATOR

Inspiration to illustrate the trees, swampscapes, road signs, and pastoral scenes of highway-side barns and tractors for "Southern Roads" (p. 103) came easy to Derik Hobbs because he'd seen it all before. "In college I took a trip from Houston to Nashville," says the Music City artist. "Cutting across the South in the middle of August was beautiful-and long." Hobbs has drawn for Wine & Spirits and Robb Report, as well as created book covers and album designs for Nashville musicians. As soon as he can, he says, he'll get back on the road. "A West Coast redwood forest trip has been at the top of my list for a while."





Debra Freeman

Debra Freeman is the first to admit that her passion for heirloom melons gets intense. "The farthest I've ever driven for watermelon is probably Pennsylvania, a six-hour drive one way," says the Richmond-based writer, who with her partner, Joshua Fitzwater, tracks down growers of all sorts of rare Southern produce for their YouTube series, Heirloom Hunters. For the last two years, Freeman has traced unique watermelon varieties and even propagated some, a quest she writes about in "A Taste for Heirlooms" (p. 64). Odell's White is her absolute favorite, she says. "I haven't had one where the texture and taste weren't perfect."

"The farthest I've ever driven for watermelon is Pennsylvania, a six-hour drive one way"

-Debra Freeman, who tracks down rare fruit varieties (p. 64)



Jennifer Cole Rodriguez

PHOTOGRAPHER

At the end of Jennifer Cole Rodríguez's scheduled photo shoot with the musician Amythyst Kiah (p. 31) Kiah and her crew stuck around to take extra shots outside the Jonesborough, Tennessee, studio. "Everyone was having a great time and didn't want it to end." Rodriguez says. The Asheville photographer has shot for British Voque and WNC Magazine, and has spent the last year at a sailing school in Oriental, North Carolina, working and living aboard a sailboat with her mutt, Finnegan. "Finn is just getting his sea logs," she says. Soon, she intends to merge her two passions and chronicle the stories of people who live on boats.



Michael Marsicano

ILLUSTRATOR

As he drew the illustrations for "Lake House Reverie" (p. 134), Michael Marsicano recalled his childhood summer days in New York's Catskill Mountains. "The nostalgic feelings associated with being young in nature ring true no matter where you spent those magical months," he says. Marsicano lives in Sarasota, Florida, where he teaches in the Ringling College of Art + Design's illustration department and creates projects for the likes of the National Archives and the Southern Poverty Law Center. On Instagram (@m_marsicano), he's sharing illustrations of his summer travels through the Connecticut countryside.



Vivian Howard

WRITER

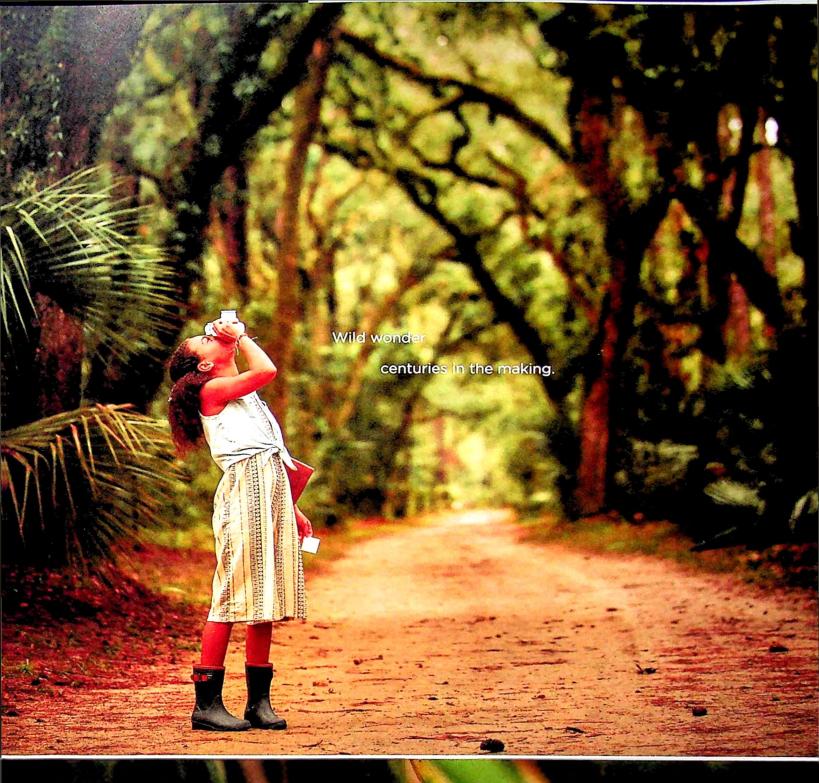
To the hats Vivian Howard wears chef, restaurateur, television personality, cookbook authoradd Garden & Gun columnist. "I normally only get to write about food," she says. "But I wanted to share the perspective of someone who lives in the rural South but has an understanding of the urban experience." In her first column (p. 98), Howard rolls out her summertime daydreams. "In all things, I'm seasonally driven," she says. "In summer I'm dreaming about the beach." Howard recently opened two restaurants in Charleston, South Carolina: Handy & Hot bake shop and Lenoir, an homage to the agricultural South.



Sean Flynn

WRITER

In 2017, the journalist Sean Flynn decided to adopt peacocks, something even he concedes was a little questionable. "But when someone says, Do you want a peacook?' how do you say no?" Flynn asks. Now Ethel Suzi Carlotta Carl, and Mr. Pickle roam a large pen in Flynn's backyard in Durham, North Carolina. "We're getting into breeding season, so the males make noise constantly," he says. "I have very patient neighbors." Flynn's book Why Peacocks? recently hit shelves, and for "Hatching the Impossible" (p. 118), he reports on the breeders who will do almost anything to create a peacock with strange and surprising colors



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"I found Barbara Howar's book when I was a teenager in the 1980s, and it spoke and sang to me"

MEAT-AND-THREE

I was so excited to read about my high school hangout, Valle's—formerly the Italian Rebel—in Memphis ("Fork in the Road," April/May 2021). This place holds many fond memories for me and is run by the sweetest family ever.

Laura Ruth Collierville, Tennessee

lenjoyed reading "There's the Rub" (Books, April/May 2021). When I was in college in the early seventies in DeLand, Florida, the only place you could get anything smoked was at a little place on the outskirts of town that had a takeout window. That article got me thinking, and I can't remember any barbecue places in Central Florida that weren't Black owned. They are still some of the best spots I know.

A. J. Newman Panacea, Florida

I bought some boar bacon from a grocery store meat counter without knowing the source. I know how to cook, but it was like trying to gnaw an area rug. Even the dogs turned up their noses. I recommend ordering from one of your better-thought-of sources ("High on the Hog," February/March 2021).

J. Lynn Hays Westerville, Ohio

CELEBRITY SIGHTINGS

I'm a Brit, so of course I adore Monty Don (Green Thumb, April/May 2021). I watched *Monty Don's American Gardens*, the series where he visited the United States. I have family in South Carolina, so I was especially interested in that episode.

Sarah Mottram

Horndean, Hampshire, England

What an excellent article on Eric Church ("Church's Sanctuary," April/May 2021). I was so happy to learn he listened to Kris Kristofferson's *The Austin Sessions*, too. It's my absolute favorite album.

Tracy D'Amour Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Eric Church is a musical genius. We have a house in Banner Elk, North Carolina, and the place he used as a recording studio for *Heart & Soul*, Artisanal, is the best restaurant in the High Country. What a cool building to make into a studio. And like always, he killed it.

Jamie McBride Wilkesboro, North Carolina

I enjoyed the profile of Barbara Howar ("The Last of the Southern Girls," April/ May 2021). My late mother and Hoved

Cover Camper

Transforming a vintage travel trailer into a one-ofa-kind road-ready masterpiece her book Laughing All the Way. I found it when I was a teenager in the 1980s, and it spoke and sang to me. She is a fabulous writer and long overdue for recognition.

Dianne Henderson Lopp Tulsa, Oklahoma

Everyone from the Mississippi Gulf Coast is required to have at least one art print by Walter Anderson in their home (Music, April/May 2021). Sorry, I don't make the rules.

Emily Liner Columbus, Mississippi

THOUGHTS OF HOME

After reading the Editor's Letter and seeing David DiBenedetto's gorgeous library (April/May 2021), I am inspired to rearrange my bookshelves.

Karin Pendley Koser Atlanta, Georgia

The mountain house near Brevard ("Southern Retreats," April/May 2021) looks like a North Carolina Frank Lloyd Wright.

Cheley Stutzman Chapel Hill, North Carolina

CAST A LINE

Mark Barr's essay reminiscing on his childhood (Our Kind of Place, April/May 2021) was excellent. It was such a Mark Twain-worthy adventure on Arkansas's White River. I absolutely loved it!

James Beers Sherwood, Arkansas

I loved reading about finding monster trout in Georgia ("Land of the Giants," April/May 2021). I fished there once—a special occasion gifted to me by my wife. What a day I got to spend on the Soque!

Tom Marler Milton, Georgia

The Road Towed travel trailer on the cover was restored by Florida's Heintz Designs from a vintage 1967 frame. Founder and CEO Tim Heintz works his magio on all manner of recreational vehicles. We fell in love with the trailer

at first glance, and then hit the highway. To see more of Heintz's work, visit heintzdesigns. com.lf you're new to RVing, check out Go RVing (gorving.com) for advice and a guide to modern vehicles, rentals, and trip planning.





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CRAZY FOR PAWPAWS

I bought two pawpaw trees at Monticello's Heritage Harvest Festival that possibly descended from Thomas Jefferson's trees. They are six years old and five feet tall now but have produced no fruit yet. I just bought a Peterson pawpaw—his Susquehanna ("The Pawpaw Pusher," February/March 2021). Maybe they'll cross-pollinate. Hope springs eternal.

Steve Ellis Savannah, Georgia

My grandfather in Pennsylvania had a pawpaw tree right across the street from his house. As a child, I didn't care for pawpaws, but in retrospect, the flavor was unique. I've been wanting to try one again ever since, but I don't think I've even seen one in twenty-some years.

Ian Grieve Savannah, Georgia

While we're talking about pawpaws, don't forget the mayhaw tree for its tart yellow and red berries, which make the best damned jelly in the world.

Bill Sanders Waco, Texas

BERMUDA ON MY MIND

When my friend gave me a gift subscription to Garden & Gun last year, I was completely nonplussed. Owning neither garden nor gun, I initially thought my dear friend had made a mistake. How wrong I was! I now look forward to each magazine delivery and especially loved your February/March 2021 issue. The article by Latria Graham ("Sea Change") touched my heart. I, too, remember the pain of losing a beloved grandmother and a subsequent search for solace in nature.

Dona D. Vaughn New York, New York

I love Latria Graham's eye and ear for story and her storyteller's lyric. I hope that Graham's pieces—and ones from other contributors of color—will be a part of your regular, forever flow.

Katti Gray Little Rock, Arkansas

AN ARTIST REMEMBERED
When I read John Ed Bradley's saga
surrounding the determination of Cora

Kelley Ward to fulfill her heartfelt artistic purpose ("Outside the Lines," February/ March 2021), I was moved to tears. He brought her to life for me, along with the amazing paintings that showed just who she was: a strong pioneer and a fascinating woman who made her own rules and lived by them. I'm originally from Louisiana, and her spirit and spunk ring a familiar bell. I feel like I know her now, and I thank him for the lovely introduction to this admirable lady and her outstanding talent.

W.R. Kaplan Charlotte, North Carolina

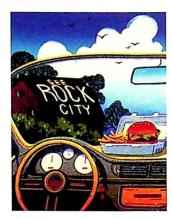
In the story on Cora Kelley Ward, the author describes the breakup of her marriage to my father, Si Ward, in a way that is misleading and frankly wrong. Cora and Dad were married in 1941, right before Pearl Harbor. Dad felt it was his duty to go to war and always blamed the war for the disintegration of the marriage. He thought Cora was involved with a physician who had remained stateside. True or not, we all try to find reasons for things we do not understand or cannot accept. For the record, while Dad may have been upset by his wife leaving, he never "threw a fit." He was incredibly cool under fire. Until the day he died, Dad had a large and painful place in his heart for the Louisiana artist in New York City.

Simon V. Ward III Charlotte, North Carolina

John Ed Bradley responds: My task was to try to explain Cora Kelley Ward and her art. I spoke to dozens of people, including three of her siblings and several friends with whom she discussed her past. The anecdotes and observations I used in my story were as they gave them to me. It was Cora's sister Jessica Balovich who witnessed the dissolution of Cora's marriage and described it to me. Her quotes came from a transcript of our recorded interview. Simon Ward's 2000 memoir, in which he detailed an alleged infidelity by Cora, presented a story that Cora couldn't defend against because she was no longer around. Jessica was outraged by the claim and rejected it. My story was about a great, forgotten artist. The last thing I wanted to do was detract from how Simon Ward is remembered.

Social Chatter

GARDENANDGUN.COM AND BEYOND



WE ASKED

It's not a Southern road trip without...

On Facebook and Twitter, readers told us what completes the perfect summertime adventure.

A pecan log roll from Stuckey's and a stop at a fireworks stand.

David Lantrip

SEE ROCK CITY signs.
Cindy Thurman Locklear

The Allman Brothers, Chris Stapleton, Alabama Shakes, and Patsy Cline. Dena Corbin Yoder

A fried clam dinner at Howard Johnson. @trecoal

Seeing the rocket at the Alabama welcome center. Samson Katz

Boiled peanuts from a Crock-Pot in the back of a gas station.
Holly CS Broyles

A stop at the Piggly Wiggly—whether we need anything or not.
Theresa Rivora Rousseau

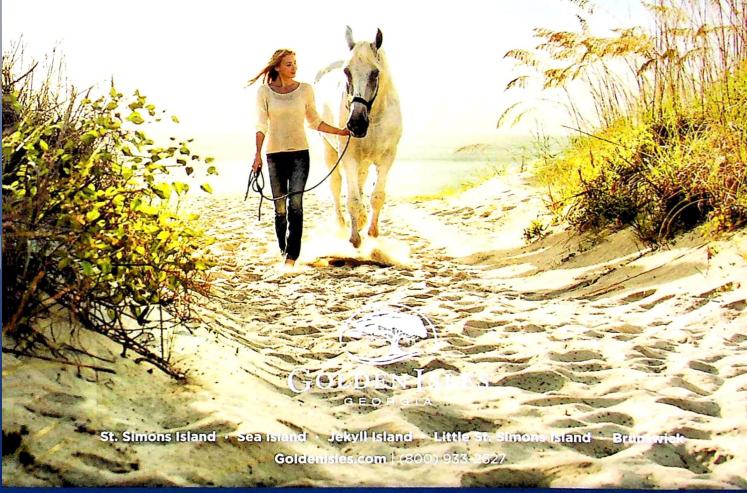
Coke and a pack of Nabs.

@Owlsforinda

A Little Debbie Oatmeal Creme Pie warming on the dashboard. Lawana Adcock-Downey



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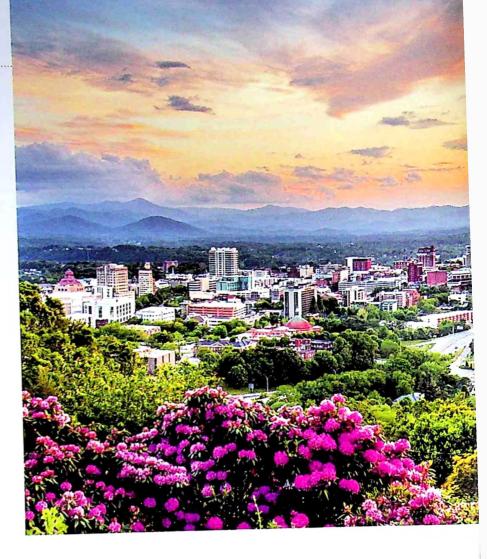
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A New Shade of Blue

IN ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA. A WIDER CELEBRATION OF THE CITY'S RICH HISTORY PROVIDES VISITORS WITH A FRESH EXPERIENCE

nthe hills of Southern Appalachia at the confluence of the Swannanoa and French Broad Rivers sits Asheville, North Carolina. With a reputation for hospitality and a vibrant artistic spirit, the city has art, culinary, and music scenes that regularly capture the attention of travelers. Over the last decade, a movement has grown to spotlight the underappreciated parts of the city—an effort to support the diverse and dynamic tapestry that makes Asheville unique. This year, several new initiatives illuminate the city's expansive history, proving there is so much more to love about this eclectic Blue Ridge town than might meet the eye.



Clockwise from above: A Blue Ridge vista over Asheville; Southern comforts at Benne on Eagle; art deco grandeur at the Asheville Art Museum; Benne on Eagle chef de cuisine Malcolm McMillian.

Upon arrival in Asheville, many have followed a familiar path down Biltmore Avenue and Broadway. Full of gastronomic delights, the open-air hub is also filled with music, from sidewalk bluegrass acts to a string of iconic music venues. Here, the avenues are studded with mom-and-pop outfits alongside newer stores, while the main thorough fare holds one of the country's largest collections of untouched art deco buildings. But just one street away from this well-traveled strip is a quiet tree-lined boulevard known as the Block. Once Asheville's Black business district, this was home to a group of ambitious entrepreneurs. During the last half of the twentieth century, an urban renewal crusade led to the displacement of many residents, but in recent years, members of the city's Black community have forged grassroots development projects to bolster the area once more.

One such resident is DeWayne Barton. As the artist and visionary behind Hood Huggers International, he leads walking tours down Eagle Street and beyond, pointing out important landmarks to the visitors he accompanies through the city's historic Black neighborhoods. His promenades visit culturally significant but often undercelebrated sections of Asheville, accompanied by stories of struggle, creativity, and

courage, leaving his guests with a deeper appreciation of the people and places that helped shape the city. "The art of resilience is creating a way out of no way," Barton explains. Projects like his not only create lasting community relationships but document Asheville's history and lift up its Black-owned businesses.

The heart of the Block is the YMI Cultural Center. Formerly known as the Young Men's Institute Building, it was designed by architect Richard Sharp Smith in the early 1890s. The historic meeting hall was a cultural gem among the city's Black population and remains a cornerstone of the community. Today, the center hosts in-person and virtual events focused on local history and culture. Onsite, a permanent exhibition showcases a collection of photographs highlighting the YMI's history and its ties to the Biltmore Estate, as well as rotating works by local artists of varying disciplines.

A newly opened haven for Black artists, Noir Collective AVL, sits on the same block. Part boutique shop, part gallery, the space is an outlet for Black creatives within the city's thriving maker culture, bringing shoppers face-to-face with the artists themselves. Tremendous works by well-known creators are available for purchase here, including pieces by muralist and multimedia artist Irene "Jenny" Pickens. The self-taught artist grew up in

Asheville's Southside community, and her emotionally resonant portraits and handcrafted dolls gained popularity at the city's annual festivals and art-centric events.

In a town as storied as Asheville, heritage, tradition, and legacy take on new meanings through the eyes of the city's creative entrepreneurs. Many of these experiences are expressed through food, and here, chefs pay a passionate homage to the Appalachian spirit that permeates the mountains.

Among Asheville's greatest culinary treasures is Benne on Eagle. The critically acclaimed restaurant lies just around the corner from the YMI, and its continued exploration of the Black roots of Appalachian cookery has garnered great praise—including multiple nods from the James Beard Foundation. Following in the footsteps of the celebrated chef Ashleigh Shanti, Malcolm McMillian has recently joined the much-lauded restaurant as its new chef de cuisine. A classically trained culinary practitioner, McMillian sees food as a road map to understanding the landscape and has made his name by drawing on the distinctive corners of the region's culinary legacy.

For restaurants such as Benne on Eagle, Asheville's farmers and artisans are the backbone of Appalachia's centuries-long food tradition, evident in each locally driven dishon their menus.





It's this deep connection to the land that also made Asheville the first city in the country to be recognized by the Green Restaurant Association as a Green Dining Destination. Balancing the values of environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic vitality, local restaurants and members of the food industry have created an atmosphere of creativity and innovation—not to mention some unforgettable meals.

Against a stunning backdrop of mountains and mist, it's folks like these who are setting the scene for a new era in Asheville: one that honors the city's past and makes way for a more vibrant, inclusive future. Even this summer's Chow Chow events, back for a second installment after 2019's wildly successful run, are shifting their focus to spark broader conversations around racial justice and climate change through a slew of culinary happenings in June, July, and August. And for visitors to the area, Asheville is becoming more than a charming stop on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Thanks to these shining efforts (and countless more), the city offers a refreshed and compelling vision of Appalachia, where the beauty and value of the local community lie at the heart of it all.

Plan your trip at ExploreAsheville.com



Whether it's live music, fine art, or outdoor adventure you seek, these open-air activities showcase Asheville's best

Take in a garden installation

From April 1 on, the work of artist Patrick Dougherty appears on the grounds of the Biltmore Estate. Marvel at his towering woven-branch sculpture up close as you wander through the green spaces.

Catch an outdoor show

Rabbit Rabbit is a new openair music venue, created by the teams behind the Orange Peel and Asheville Brewing Company. The space hosts live shows and movie screenings paired with bites and libations from food trucks and local brewers.

Hit the trails

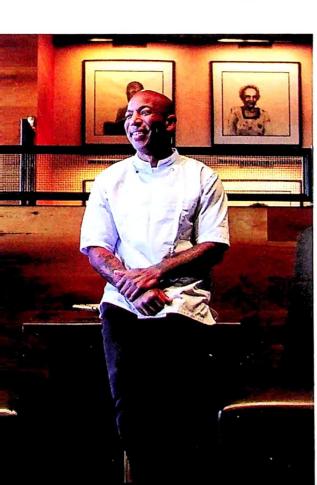
To see the region from new heights, book a guided excursion with a local outfit such as Hike Bike Kayak Asheville. The company offers six hike categories including waterfalls, wildflowers, and snowshoeing, so an adventure awaits for every season.

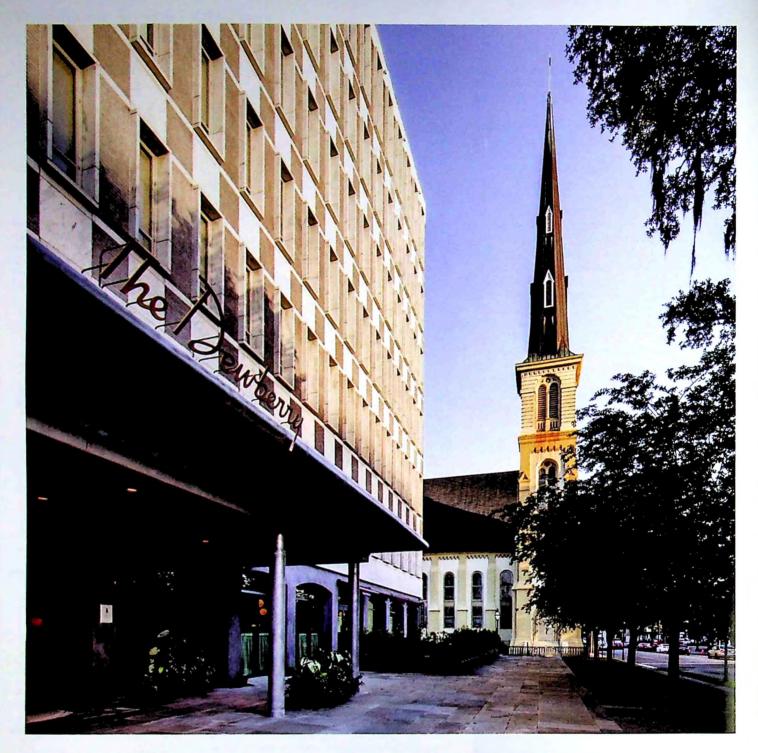
Venture to Black Mountain

Just twenty minutes east of Asheville, Black Mountain is known as the "front porch of the Blue Ridge Mountains." A perfect day-trip destination, the idyllic town is dotted with craft galleries, bistros, lush parks, and popular trailheads.

Experience the LEAF Festival

Also in Black Mountain, the fall LEAF Festival returns to Lake Eden October 14-17. A signature event of the LEAF Global Arts Center, the outdoor gathering features live music, artisan vendors, and local food and drink.



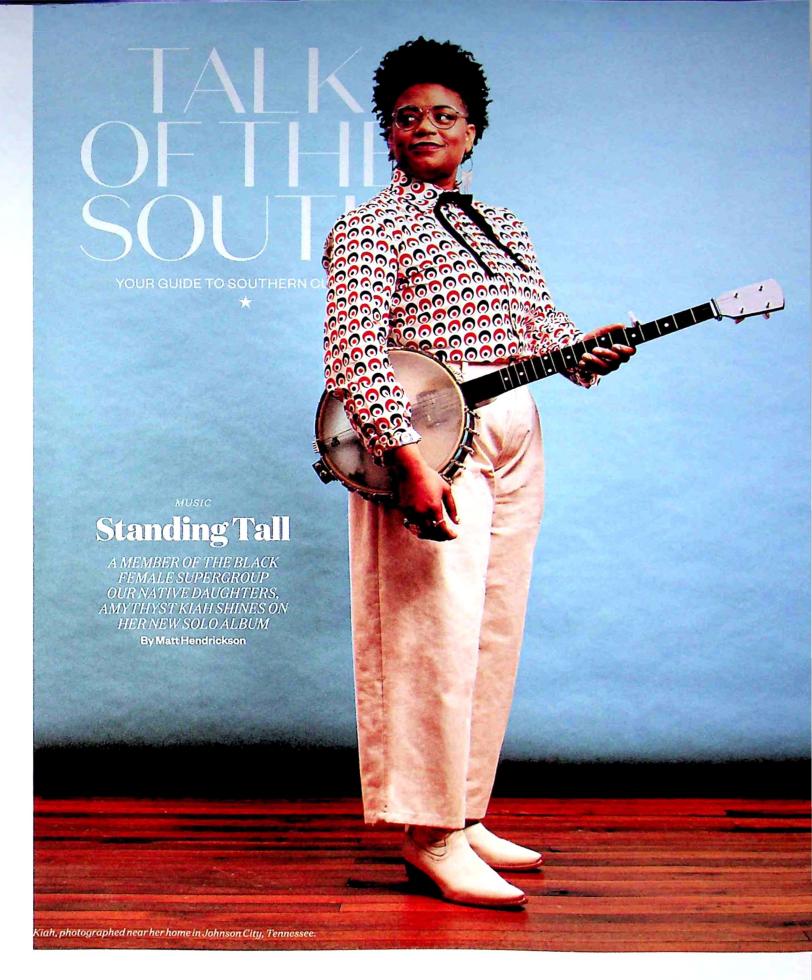


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TALKOF THESOUTH

he most indelible moments in music come when a song raises the hair on the back of your neck and makes you put your fist in the air and stomp your feet. From classics such as Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" and Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" to more current numbers such as "Sweeter" by Leon Bridges and Tyler Childers's "Long Violent History," some of the most powerful tunes can also soundtrack

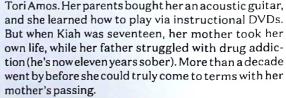
a movement and become a force for change. "Black Myself," by the East Tennessee singer-songwriter Amythyst Kiah, is one of those songs. ¶ Over a throbbing drumbeat and a crunchy blues guitar riff, Kiah sings-with an occasional snarl-a thrilling song that reclaims Black identity, something that has consistently been degraded for four hundred years. "Black Myself" is an anthem of those times and for these times. "This is the longest sustained interest in talking about racial injustice that I think I've ever seen," she says via a Zoom chat from her home in Johnson City, Tennessee. "So what a time to make the point, keep the conversation going, and maybe bring in some new people."

> 2021, though Kiah already received a Grammy nomination for it...two years ago. The original, folkier version appeared on the 2019 debut album by Our Native Daughters, a women-of-color supergroup assembled by Rhiannon Giddens (with Kiah, Leyla McCalla, and Allison Russell) that mines the Black female experience to craft searing songs addressing the stains of slavery, racism, and misogyny. As Kiah was nearing the end of recording her new album, Wary + Strange, her producer, Tony Berg, suggested she take another crack at the song. "I hadn't really envisioned it being part of Wary + Strange," Kiah says. "But a big part of the album is the different hardships that I've faced to bring me to the point where I am today. For me, being Black is quintessentially wary and strange."

> She has confronted that uneasiness more than once. Kiah graduated from East Tennessee State University with a major in Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Country Music Studies, and was one of the only people of color in the program. But she found a welcoming group of friends and played in the university's Old-Time Pride Band. "I started meeting really awesome people that understood the background and the history of the music," she says. "West African culture was a huge part of string band music and country music."

> In conversation, Kiah, who is thirty-four, is measured and calm, though she shows glimpses of her "goofy side" during our ninety-minute chat. But underneath the laughter is nearly twenty years of struggle in the search for who she is, all of which is distilled beautifully on Wary + Strange. Raised in Chattanooga, she played a lot of sports as a child, but her teenage years brought on social anxiety and body issues. Instead of running around the basketball court, she stayed at home listening to nineties alternative rock such as Nirvana and

"Black Myself" might end up being an anthem of



"I tried to bury how I was feeling," she says. "It wasn't until going to therapy that I realized I hadn't been grieving for my mother."

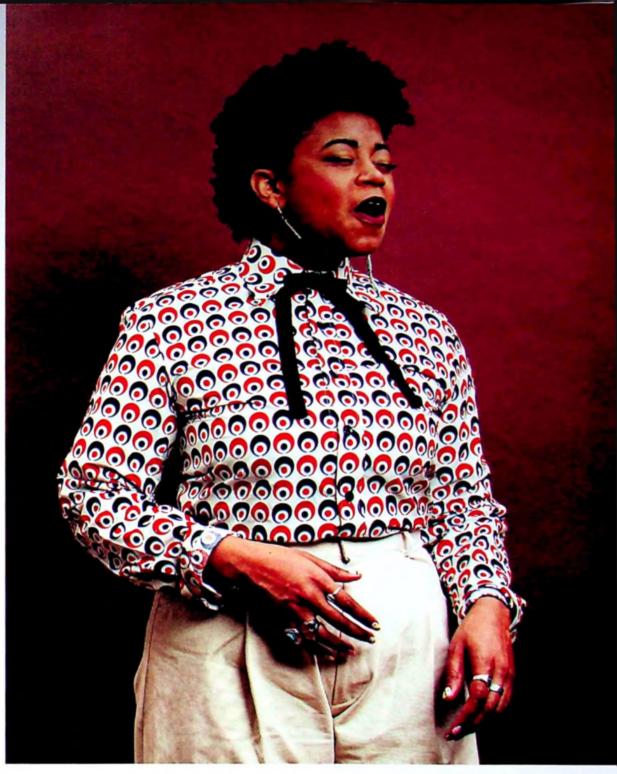
One of Wary + Strange's most piercing moments



"A big part of the album is the different hardships I've faced to bring me to the point wherelam today. For me, being Black is quintessentially waryand strange"







is the haunting "Wild Turkey," in which Kiah tries to make sense of what her mother was thinking at the time. "Wild Turkey in the car seat / The bottle's empty. I hope it gave her some relief," she sings. "Cause she's never coming back/No, she's never coming back." The song did not come easy. "It took me two years to write because I was finally giving my younger self permission to feel what I was feeling, as opposed to trying to bury it and ignore it," she says.

Kiah lives in Johnson City with her father, who is now retired and has helped her with the minutiae of managing a music career (she admits to being a "total scatterbrain"). She's been in a relationship with her girlfriend, Jessica, for three years, and during the pandemic they've missed hanging out at their favorite bar for pint night. The two are considering taking a drive to nearby Asheville the next weekend. The mountains around her home hold a strong pull. "I like traveling, but when I come back and see those mountains, there's this sense of home and peace that settles in me," she says. "It's a feeling where I know everything is gonna be sine." 🖸

Raised in Chattanooga, Kiah studied music at East Tennessee State University. Wary + Strange is out in June.

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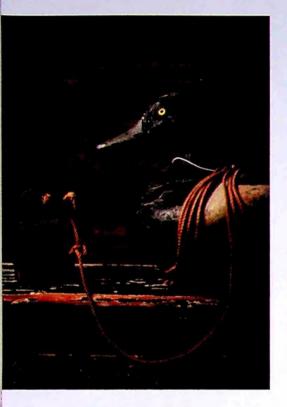
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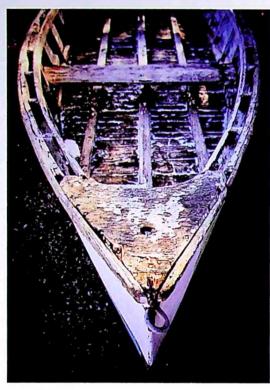
For a complete itinerary, current travel regulations, and booking information, visit GardenandGun.com/Bermuda

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SPORTING SCENE

Down East Beacon

A NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM HOLDS ON TO SPORTING HISTORY AND COASTAL CULTURE WHILE LOOKING AHEAD

By T. Edward Nickens

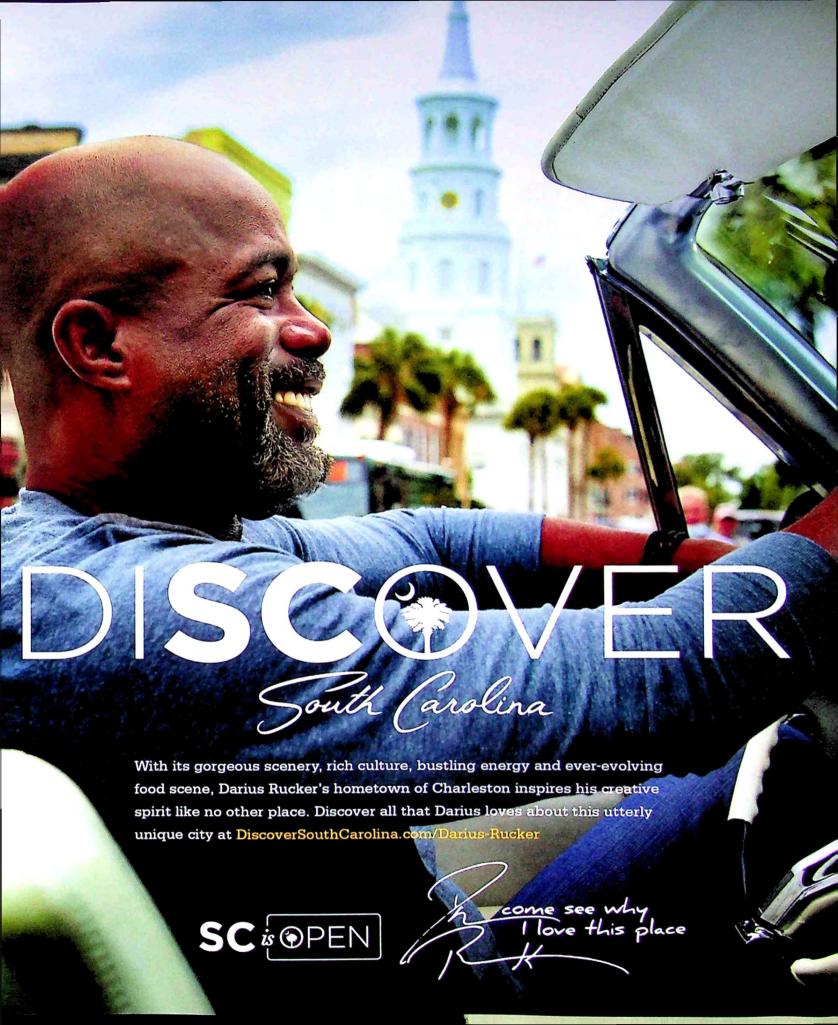
t's a curious item to cause a stir, amid the canvas paintings, the boat models, and the astonishing collection of antique and contemporary hand-carved decoys from the Core Sound region of Eastern North Carolina. But causing a little stir is what Joel Hancock's great-greatgreat-grandfather's whale harpoons are doing. Hancock, a retired insurance executive, and his wife, Susan, crowd around a table with Karen Amspacher, director of the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center, and Pam Morris, the museum's collections manager, as Hancock hands over a pair of forged-iron harpoon spikes, pitted with age.

The soaring twenty-thousand-square-foot museum on the "east'ard end" of Harkers Island, as locals would say, is a home-away-from-the-workshop for local and visiting decoy carvers. Through the spring and summer, guests from the nearby Crystal Coast beaches head for the regional landmark, including many hunters who need a summer fix of duck calls and gunning lore. But more so than most, perhaps, this museum is as rooted in present-day community as it is in history and heritage. And that deep relationship with residents is what led Hancock here today, to donate his family heirlooms to the museum.

For centuries, Hancock explains, the shore-based whalers in North Carolina's Cape Lookout region met migrating right whales that coursed north along Shackleford Banks, the southernmost barrier island in what is now Cape Lookout National Seashore, just offshore of Harkers Island. They would watch from the highest dunes, their wooden dories on the beach, harpoons readjed. Before the advent of oil wells and plastics, whale products were a surprisingly ubiquitous

item. Whale oil fired the lamps of cities and towns, and blazed from the cupolas of lighthouses. The flexible filter-like baleen inside a whale's mouth was used in industrial-age products from buggy whips to parasols. In a typical year, perhaps four whales might

The Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center features the likes of local decoys, wooden boats, and carving tools.



TALKOF THESOUTH

be brought to the Cape Lookout beaches, with the value of oil and whalebone from a single right whale ranging from \$1.200 to \$1.500.

"You have to wonder if one of these was ever really used on a whale," says Hancock, holding one of the harpoons. It's likely they were. His ancestor and the original owner of them, Billy Hancock, was one of the best known of the old Shackleford Banks whalers.

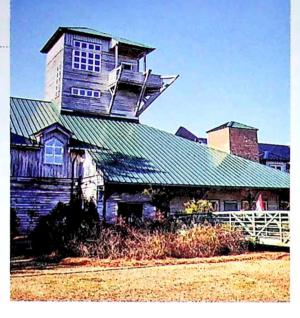
Next to him, Morris holds the other harpoon, swinging a large barb in and out of its recess in the two-footlong forged tip. "I've seen photos, reproductions, and models of old whaling harpoons from the Banks," she says, "but I've never held the real thing."

She is quiet for a moment. "It makes me wonder what folks back then thought of as valuable," she ponders. "Did they worry about passing along their traditions like we do today? And how did they share their own stories about the changes in their communities?" Those are weighty questions for a piece of corroded iron to bring to the surface, but Morris might be for given a moment of heavy introspection. In 1899, a series of devastating hurricanes nearly wiped the whaling communities of Cape Lookout off the map. Hancock's ancestors, and Amspacher's too, fled the barrier islands forever. For those who live on Harkers Island and in the twelve other small communities in the Down East region, any touchstone to the life-altering power of a hurricane sets off a deeply personal chord.

When Hurricane Florence roared ashore in the Carolinas in September 2018, the museum was in the storm's northwest-quadrant crosshairs. The hurricane dumped twenty to thirty inches of rain on the region, with wind gusts of 106 miles per hour at nearby Cape Lookout. It was the staying power of the storm, however, that proved so devastating. Hurricane-force winds raked the museum for more than sixteen straight hours. Torrential rain fell for thirty-six.

The museum roof held for half the storm, recalls Amspacher, but that wasn't enough. "When the rain came," she says, "it went everywhere. Down the walls, inside the walls, through the walls, you name it." The entire structure had to be gutted. While an insurance policy covered the packing up and storage of the museum's decoys, fine art, and other irreplaceable exhibits, volunteers, partnering museums, and staff packed the rest-books, quilts, boat models, gift shop inventory, and computers-into five hundred donated fish boxes for what would be a nearly two-year hiatus in storage.

Today, after a \$3 million rebuild, the museum is resplendent, a phoenix rising from sodden drywall. And while two-thirds of the main floor is dedicated to the region's rich decoy-carving and duck-hunting history, the museum has always been about more than the ducks. The structure's second floor holds community exhibits that use donated items—family photos, quilts, tools, and boat models-to tell the stories of the thirteen small Down East settlements such as Stacy, Marshallberg, Davis, and Cedar Island. Residents use the



building itself for events ranging from family reunions to public meetings to funeral-planning seminars. "The museum is a means to an end," Amspacher says. "It's not what's inside this building that matters as much as what goes on out there, in the community, that is rooted in this building."

Hancock's harpoons are a good example of that synergy: a family heirloom from one of the region's oldest families, but also an artifact that points the way toward recognizing that saving history in the present will have to mean something other than how it was preserved in the past.

"I learned about the old Banks whalers not because I went to a class, but because the old folks on Harkers Island talked about them down at the store," Hancock explains. "Younger generations don't go to work with their daddies at the net house anymore. They don't go hang out at the old store. A museum has to be intentional and purposeful to hand down this history that was given to us without anyone even thinking about it."

How to hold fast to the past without ignoring the future is a lesson Down East residents have learned the hard way, and one that Amspacher and others are committed to keeping front and center now that Hurricane Florence itself is a memory. While the museum's duck calls and workboats are the main draw, a soaring new exhibit explores sea level rise in a deep. community-oriented, personal way: Living on the Edge. It uses oral history, newspaper clippings, a survey of residents, scientific research, and interviews to explore how locals are holding on to their changing world and adapting to a future where the tides will rise ever closer.

Installing the exhibit marked a leap of faith in her community, Amspacher says. "To say that sea level rise is a contentious issue here is an understatement," she explains. "But everybody here has a hard story to tell about Florence, and that opens the door to a lot of other questions. Before that storm, I wouldn't have been brave enough to put this exhibit up. But we don't live in that world anymore. What good is all this stuff if we don't learn something from the past that leads us forward?" @





Clockwise from above: A swan mount; Joel Hancock with his ancestor's whaling harpoon; the fully restored museum.

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INTERVIEW

Dual Roles

HOLLYWOOD FIXTURE WILL PATTON RULES THE AUDIOBOOK WORLD, TOO

By Will Cathcart

ou most likely recognize Will Patton's face-you may have seen the prolific actor with Bruce Willis and Ben Affleck saving Earth by drilling a nuclear weapon into an asteroid in Armageddon. Or coaching

Remember the Titans. The South Carolina native is arguably the only good thing about the Kevin Costner film The Postman. And lately, he's starred as Garrett Randall in the hit TV series Yellowstone, and in the Oscar darling Minari. But you may also have heard Patton without realizing it: The quiet, knowing grit of his singular voice has come to define the audiobook genre. He reads in a charismatic whisper, the actor of choice to take on the words of William Faulkner, James Dickey, Denis Johnson. Ernest Hemingway, Jack London, Charles Bukowski, Don DeLillo, Stephen King, Jack Kerouac, James Lee Burke, Bob Dylan, and even Woody Guthrie.

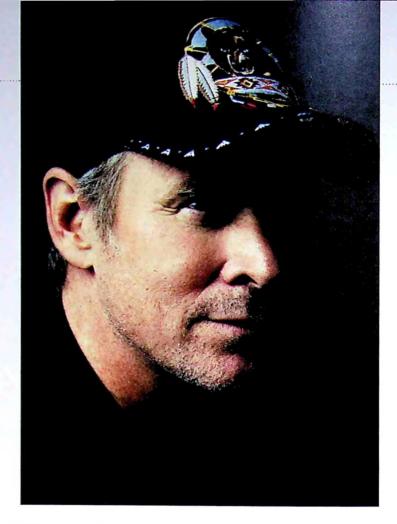
with Denzel Washington in

You aren't just reading books into a microphone, are you?

This audio work-it's almost like secrets can come through this quiet work. There's a way of influencing even some truck driver who might be thinking in some kind of way. You just lay in a line in a certain way. He's going to feel something deep inside of himself whether he knows it or not. This quiet audio work is very revealing. Maybe more than other things that actors do.

What sparked your passion for acting?

I was born in Charleston. I grew up all over the place and spent summers there. My dad went to the Citadel. He became a preacher and was a Lutheran minister up until I was about thirteen years old. He was a very rebellious minister-a performer in the pulpit. He read Camus and Sartre. He would stage people in the congregation to challenge him. He was a chaplain at Duke



Will Patton, photographed in San Diego.

University before he left the ministry. Then he was a fisherman. He ran a charter boat out in Alaska. He went all over the place. He was an English teacher at Dartmouth at one point. Host track.

From an early age, I couldn't communicate with anybody unless I was onstage. Some people have almost a kind of sickness, which leads them to health by acting. Mine came out of shyness. My dad's came out of something else.

Do you connect to Southern literature?

One of the things my dad gave to me was a love of Faulkner. He built me up to Absalom, Absalom!, which is like the crescendo. And Flannery O'Connor, of course. Those two were huge in my discovery of literature. There's something inside of them that is so layered.

I hope that in this time, people can see the crazy and mysterious truth about the South. As opposed to certain kinds of pictures being painted now by British directors basing their ideas about what the South was on some kind of misinterpreta-

tion. They are missing the vast layers of it and the weirdness of it.

How do you approach audiobook work?

The main thing is to just stay out of the writer's way. Any actor who gets in this booth with that microphone inevitably becomes naked. It's pretty clear whether someone is being honest or whether the ego is involved. A lot of great film actors get in there. And there's something that just doesn't work. It's challenging to understand what that little meter picks up at the first breath.

If somebody wants me to record their book, I look at it very carefully. I try not to do anything that I don't feel a hundred percent about. If it's a great book, I have to find the place where the writer and I meet. And that brings it to a little different level. So I let it move through me, but I also find out who the two of us are together.

Audio work is an art.

Originally it was thought of as a kind of art form. I remember when I first started doing it, a group of producers would be sitting on the other side of the glass watching like it was a performance—an intimate one-man show. It raises the stakes. Now you've got a lot of people with their studio set up in a closet. Now they say, "How many hours do you think this is going to be? How many days?" It's like when I'm working on a movie, and someone goes, "Oh, thank God, it's almost Friday." And I'm like, "What are you even doing this for? You're thinking about the weekend? What is the work? How can it be the most it can be?"

You are the voice of literary masters. Do you feel a sense of responsibility?

Absolutely. When I am approaching an audiobook, I approach it just like I do theater or a film in terms of my preparation. I try to put myself in a state where I live with that book in my head for the days leading up to it. It becomes all I'm doing while I'm doing it. I've even gotten in trouble [on set] because they'll say, "Will can't make it for this leg. He had to change his schedule around on this TV thing because he's doing an audiobook." And they're like, "What!" But this is just as important to me. If it's a good writer, that writer deserves that kind of attention.

What are you reading right now?

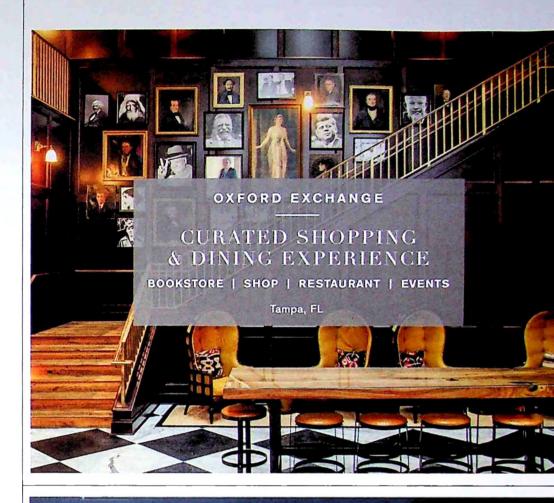
Just for me: Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard*. That old World War II book Norman Mailer wrote, *The Naked and the Dead*. Then this new Malcolm X biography, *The Dead Are Arising*.

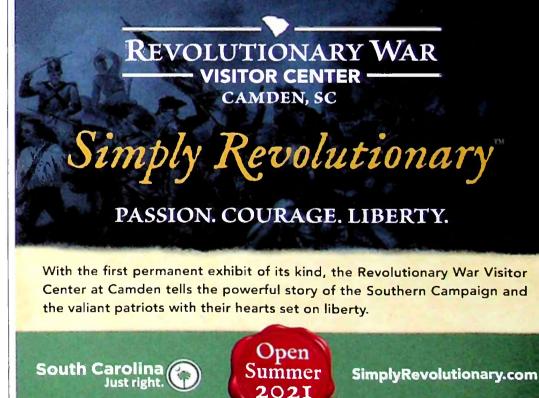
What keeps you going during an audiobook project?

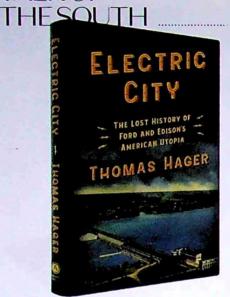
From an early age, my favorite thing was to live inside of a book. And now I get to do so, but on this further level where I am inhabiting the book viscerally. What could be better than actually living these great works of literature? It's phenomenal.

Your work appeals to so many listeners.

I remember one time I was having a hard time with a particular book or something. And the producer on the other side of the glass said, "Come on, Will, the truck drivers are gonna love it!" Then I was driving across the country one time, and I saw a bunch of my audiobooks on a rack in one of those truck stops. And I was like, Okay. I'm gonna start putting some little secrets in these books.







TALKOF

BOOKS

Megawatt Dreams

WHY HENRY FORD AND THOMAS EDISON'S SOUTHERN PARADISE FIZZLED

By Jonathan Miles

alling the idea audacious is almost criminal understatement. Imagine it: A pristine new megacity rising from the hills, bluffs, and fields of Northwest Alabama, an urban center tentimes the size of Manhattan but unlike it and every other city in most every way. Its architects envisioned

of miniature farms and villages stretching seventy-five miles along the Tennessee River, a shining city atop not one hill but hundreds. Most of its residents would work part of the year in factories and part of it on their own farms, as though with one foot toeing the future and the other planted in the past. Powering it all would be clean renewable energy. If constructed, the dream city wouldn't just alter Alabama and the South; it had the potential to change the world.

a unified but decentralized constellation

What it also had, unlike most utopian visions, was the potential to actually happen. That's because its masterminds were "the richest man in the world and the greatest inventor in the world," as Thomas Hager writes in Electric City, his beguiling history of the City That Almost Was. The Twin Wizards, as they were sometimes called: Henry Ford, whose Ford Motor Company revolutionized transportation, and Thomas Edison, whose inventions-from the light bulb to the motion picture camera-revolutionized daily life. Their yearslong efforts to found an electrified utopia in and around Muscle Shoals are mostly forgotten now, a quixotic footnote in history. But Hager rightly revives it, delivering an engaging story of high-stakes political intrigue. As "one of the biggest news events of the Roaring Twenties," he writes, Ford and Edison's city "was the cause of 138 bills and a decade of attention in Congress, spurred an investment frenzy bigger than anything since the Klondike Gold Rush, changed the direction of urban planning around the world, and helped fuel a movement that came close to electing Henry Ford president of the United States." Electric City goes one step further, shining a crisp light on the tensions between private and public development with which we still grapple today. Read this book for when Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk comes pitching a space colony.

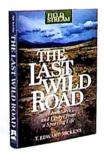
Ford believed the path to a better world ran through Muscle Shoals. And urban planning visionaries like Frank Lloyd Wright agreed. But Ford was after personal betterment, too: the same kind of spectacular profits he was raking in from automobiles. Ford needed federal buy-in to realize his and Edison's plan, and Ford's wealth and influence-he commanded a kind of Trumpian adulation from many Americans-won him support from two presidents and a majority of legislators. Yet one senator—a dour Nebraska Republican named George Norris-couldn't be cajoled, bought, or bullied. Norris saw straight through the idea's noble dressing, warning that the scheme would kick open the door "for the use of natural resources by corporations and monopolies without restriction, without regulation, and without restraint." Much of Electric City's conflict revolves around this standoff, calling to mind that old Johnny Mercer lyric: "When an irresistible force such as you / Meets an old immovable object like me." Ford and his allies battered; Norris just hardened, Ford, as was his deplorable wont, started blaming a cabal of "international Jews" for obstructing him, cranking up his public relations machine. But it was essentially Norris, "an aging relic from a nothing state" with a steadfast belief in the sanctity of public resources and the distinction between the private good and the common good, who derailed Ford's plan.

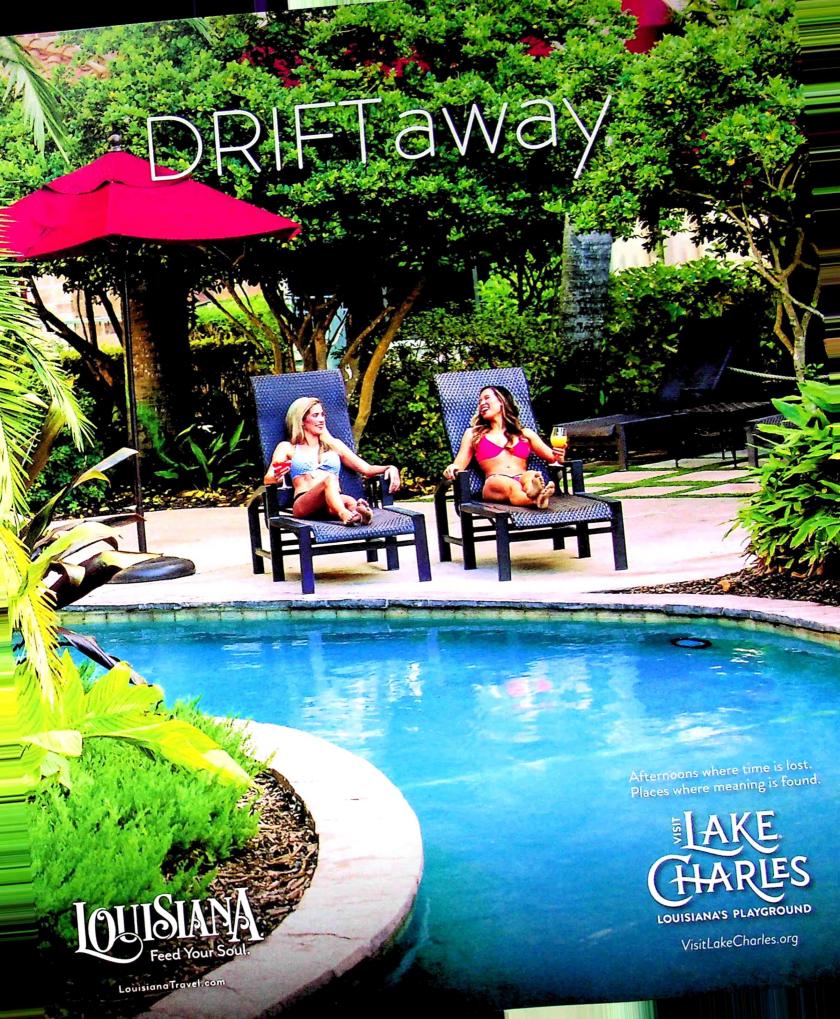
Utopias, of course, remain always just over the horizon. The point of them, the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano once wrote, is to keep walking toward them. Norris didn't dislike Ford and Edison's vision for an electrified, more prosperous Tennessee River valley; he just disliked Ford's "piratical" route to achieving it. And nine years after the senator scuttled the idea, another president-Franklin Delano Roosevelt-was heralding Muscle Shoals as the birthplace of a "new America." At the heart of this newer new America was a public-not private-corporation that George Norris helped create: the Tennessee Valley Authority, or TVA, the New Deal entity that brought power and economic development to the region. "Thank God for the TVA," goes a Jason Isbell chorus. God, and George Norris. And in an indirect way, as Electric City absorbingly shows, Henry Ford and Thomas Edison as well. Progress may often be the realization of utopias, as Oscar Wilde wrote. But sometimes, it seems, progress can also come from evading them.

Field **Notes**

Journey along with a sportsman

"There's a certain honing of spirit that comes in the pursuit of fish and game," writes Garden & Gun contributing editor T. Edward Nickens in his new book of true adventure tales. The Last Wild Road (Lyons). "Heave the woods or water with a more purposeful set of my shoulders, sharper of mind." Nickens has spent decades writing about his sporting esca pades-flats skiff fishing in the Caribbean, wading Appalachian trout runs, and hunting across every holler and hill in his home state of North Carolina, Here, he threads his stories from Field & Stream with powerful reflections on losing his father as a boy and finding a mentor in a marine sharpshooter who taught him to connect what's wild inside to the wildness outside.--CJLotz







grewup on mullet and grits for breakfast. What some people call Biloxi Bacon. I'm referring of course to the fish, specifically the striped mullet, which has a rich, nutty taste due to its high oil content, and contains healthy omega-3 fatty acids. When churches and other organizations on the Gulf Coast host fish fries to raise funds for a local cause, or a politician throws a constituent rally, you can bet they will be serving fried mullet with hush puppies and coleslaw.

In the summers, my family decamped from the outskirts of Mobile to the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay. There, I was fortunate to have as a mentor an old local named Duke Cox. Duke was a man of many talents and deep thoughts, one of them the notion that it is important to live a life full of the things that make you happy. Or as he would be more apt to put it, "The way to happiness is to avoid the things that make you unhappy." He would often remind me, "Work ain't work if you get pleasure from what you are doing, and a lot of that is about how you look at it."

One of Duke's talents was making cast nets. I was about five years old when he first made me one and taught me how to throw and spread it, reminding me all the while that this wasn't something new: They were fishing with cast nets in the Bible. Eventually he taught me how to make them myself, tying the knots with a gauge and a net needle. "All you need to know to make a cast net," he'd say, "is how to sit down and have some time on your hands." He was left-handed and I was right-handed, and he taught me to be a left-handed net caster. But I remember him saying, "It don't matter A Gulf Coast fisher man heaves a cast net for mullet.



TALKOF THE SOUTH

which hand you use, as long as it gets the job done right. Some people spend too much time worrying about being proper than about getting the job done."

Mullet are vegetarians: They are among the few fish with a gizzard, which like a chicken's gizzard grinds and digests plant material. In fact, one of my favorite dishes is fried mullet gizzards. A commercial fisherman in Florida was once acquitted for a fishing violation after a biologist testified in his defense, stating that only birds have gizzards, and since a mullet has a gizzard, it should not be considered a fish.

Striped mullet spend most of their lives in fresh or brackish water, but they migrate offshore and along the Gulf beaches in autumn and winter to spawn. That's when the females are full of eggs. Mullet roe is a popular delicacy and was once known as the caviar of the South, or poor man's caviar; locals tend to fry or salt it, then dry it. In Italy, bottarga, made from mullet roe, goes for more than \$100 a pound. The male mullet is full of milt, sometimes called "white roe," and some people like to eat that too, but Duke always said, "The first person to eat fish sperm must have been mighty hungry."

Mostly, we preferred to fish for them in the summer. My family and I stayed in a house with a big screened-in porch that extended down the whole side of the house where we slept. Duke would come walking down the road about first light with a croker sack slung over his shoulder with his cast net in it. He would scratch on the screen to wake me up, and off we would go for a day on Mobile Bay.

We owned an old cypress cross-planked rowboat, and Duke taught me to row at a young age. At first, he would row with one oar and I would have the other until I got the hang of it and graduated to both oars. We were a team.

The boat had a fantail on the stern where Duke could stand. If we were in serious need of mullet to sell, Duke would be on the fantail with his cast net all made up and ready to throw, and I would row him backward into a school. If we just needed mullet for the table or to give to friends, I would take my turn on the stern with my smaller net. Duke was small in stature, but he could spread a big twelve-foot cast net in a perfect circle with a twenty-four-foot diameter, almost every cast.

There is an age-old question as to why mullet jump. If asked about this, Duke's reply was either "Because it gives them pleasure to see the world above and get a breath of fresh air" or "You have to ask the mullet and let me know when you get an answer." When we were searching for a school, he would point out, "See that mullet over there that just jumped? He's a high jumper, which means either he's in a hurry to get somewhere or something is chasing him. It's not likely that he's with a school, so there's no need to worry about him." Continuing the lesson, he would suggest, "We need to look for mullet that are just jumping up low and flipping back on their side. Those are happy mullet." He would make a throw over those "happy" mullet, and it would be all the both of us could do to haul the cast net back in the boat.

We used to sell our fish to Mr. Stern, who ran a fish market in town. Duke's friend who had a pickup truck would haul our catch to the market for a share or sometimes just for a mess of fish to eat. Duke was pretty good at bartering and trading, and he was always good for a joke. He would often do favors for people, and when they'd say, "Thanks," he'd reply, "I can't spend a thank-you" or "I can't take that to the bank." Then he'd slap his leg and laugh that contagious laugh of his. He also had only one eye, but he could see mullet better than most people could with two.

Duke said there ain't but two ways to eat a mullet, and that's fried or smoked. We had our own smoker that we'd made out of an old refrigerator. We took the motor out of the bottom so we could build a fire out of hickory there, and cut out a small round hole in the base so the smoke could travel up inside. Next, we cut another round hole in the top to draw the smoke through. We would dress our mullet butterfly-style with the backbone in and place them on the refrigerator's racks to smoke.

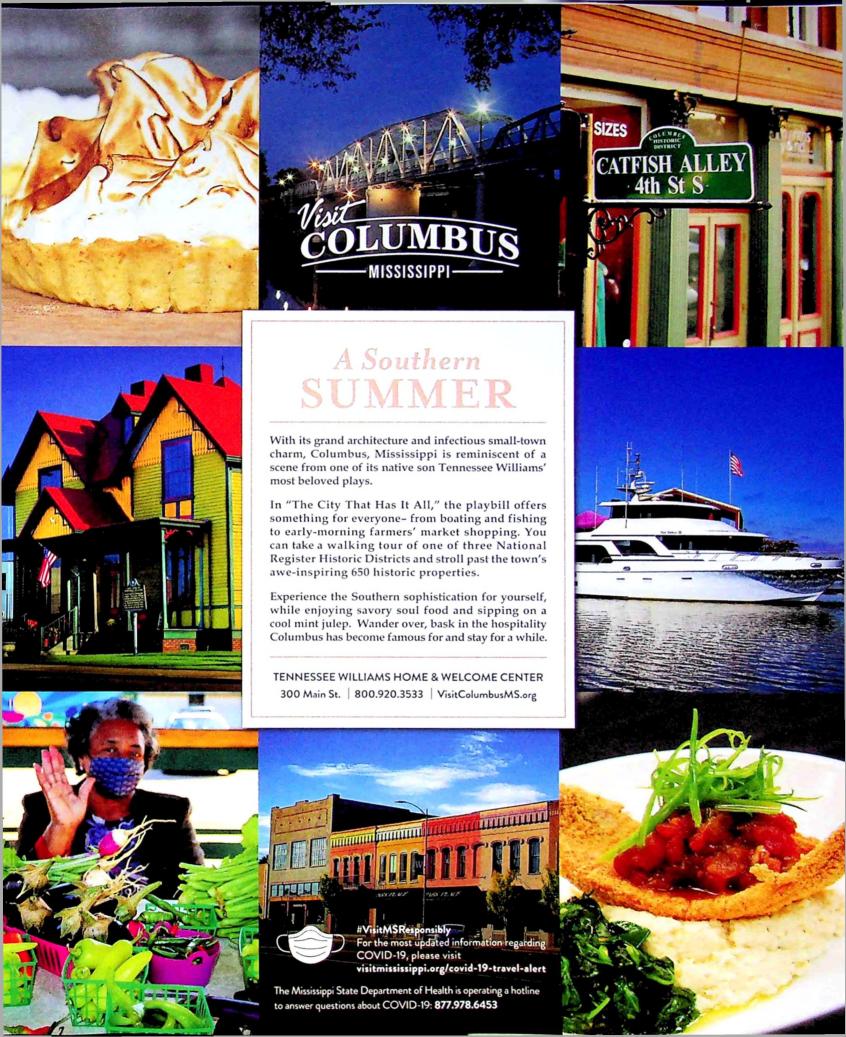
After mullet have spawned and returned to the bay and rivers, they are skinny and their meat has an unusual white coloring. Duke called them back-runners and said they weren't fit to eat till they got some meat on their bones, usually around June. Sometimes, when we had caught some of those June mullet, we would pull the boat up to the beach and build a fire with driftwood. We'd heat up some cooking oil in a big cast-iron skillet, fry up a mess of mullet, sit on a log, and eat them with white bread and hot sauce. Duke would get real quiet, like he was in deep thought. Then he'd say, with a big smile, "There ain't no mullet like a June mullet."



Duke was small in stature, but he could spread a big twelve-foot cast net in a perfect circle with a twenty-four-foot diameter, almost every cast



A bucketload of freshly netted striped mullet.





ASK G&G

Call of the Wild

GATOR VIBES, HIGH HORSES, AND MIRACLE MIGRATIONS By Guy Martin



Took a house on a bayou off Mobile Bay. What's my gator problem?

Can you run on water faster than a dolphin can swim, twenty miles per hour or better? No matter how you get permission from gravity to do it-lifelong prayer, a passing ski boat, suprahuman adrenaline-a peckish Alligator mississipplens is swims that fast. So, when you're cornered on your morning dip, your best hope is to hydroplane at greater than a dolphin's velocity. En route, please channel your inner gazelle by springing five or six feet above the water occasionally, since that's how high gators lunge to snag low-lying prey. This'll sound counterintuitive, but consider patronizing alocal philharmonic. During the summer rut, male gators respond to a B-flat played two octaves below middle C on a tuba, as proven by Florida Orchestra tuba maestro Bill Mickelsen. That low B-flat makes the alpha boys wallow and wail, dreaming of a romp with frisky alligator ladies, which can distract them from chewing your guests' legs off or popping out to grab your dog. For dockside cocktail dos, you'll want several tuba players and a box of noise-canceling headphones. Shout-out to my tuba-virtuoso cousin, William Counce: Sail that fine boat down to Mobile, tout de suite! You can rake in a cool million playing the bayous as the pied piper who lulls them into a broody dinosaur-esque nirvana.

How did the Tennessee walking horse come to be? A salute to the silky-smooth Cadillac ride of the Mid-South. Legend has it that in the 1790s, some enterprising Tennessee breeders crossed Kentucky pacers with some Spanish mustangs out of Texas. The breed book lists the first sire as Black Allan, foaled in 1886, who, by his own ornery self, would not be harnessed to a carriage. He wanted to pace, foreshadowing the three gaits, including the running walk, that Tennessee walkers developed. Now the breed splits along training lines that starkly divide the easy-gaited pleasure horses from the performance animals, among whom the dark side of the breed's history lies. In the 1950s, trainers began stressing show walkers' front legs with the "soring" process, as in, literally, to make sore. Specifically, they strapped on chains and or applied chemical irritants to the walkers' front ankles so that, to resolve the irritation, the horses would achieve what show judges call the Big Lick, that high, prancing, dressage-like step-out characteristic of walkers. In 1970, Congress aimed the Horse Protection Act at interdicting this mistreatment. Illegal soring still exists, and highly stacked front shoes are still used, but investigators have grown more polished at tracking scofflaws. Bottom line: Tennessee walkers are an athletic. spirited, distinctly Southern breed. They don't deserve

Is it just me, or does the South have more, better birds than everywhere else?

to suffer at the hands of any two-legged deceiver.

We do. Three of the four North and South American flyways converge here. Working west to east, the Central Flyway runs from the Canadian Midwest's arctic to Texas and beyond. The Mississippi Flyway feeds the central Deep South, springing over the Gulf of Mexico to the Yucatan on down. The Atlantic Flyway serves species heading to and from South America through the Caribbean. Rufa red knots, arguably the hardiest Atlantic denizens, clock a mind-bending 9,300-mile $spring trek from the tip of Chile to the Canadian {\it Arctic}.$ during which they gorge on sea worms and horseshoe crabeggs at landfall in Georgia, South Carolina, and on up. In autumn, they reverse the trip. The South's three flyways compose an immense airborne transfer system, perhaps better imagined as a parallel cosmos that avian civilizations have attached to hospitable points in our region. One scientifically renowned Atlanticside commuter, a rufa red knot tagged B95, ran up 400,000 miles in twenty years pounding the length of the planet. Since that's 160,000 miles farther than to the moon, ornithologists called him the Moonbird. We're obliged to be good hosts for travelers like him.

reset.

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SOUTHERN FOCUS



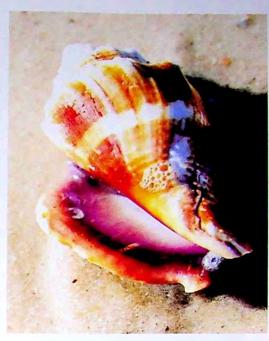
Michoacán, Mexico

Photograph by Medford Taylor

In the Sierra Chincua sanctuary, in Mexico's high oyamel-fir forests, monarch butterflies cluster on a cobweb thistle. "I was thinking of color—drawn to the red of the thistle and the gathering of the monarchs," recalls the Virginia-based photographer Medford Taylor, who traveled to monarch sanctuaries along the border of the states of México and Michoacán to capture images of the butterflies in their annual overwintering spots. After spending the summer in Canada, the pollinators fly south each fall, usually arriving in Mexico by the beginning of November, often on the Day of the Dead. "The families celebrate in the cemeteries, and they look up and see the monarchs passing over," Taylor says. "Many believe they are the spirits of their ancestors." Once settled, the butterflies remain through winter, beginning the return trip north in March. "I've seen it—all of a sudden, the air fills with them, and they go," Taylor remembers. "They just go; it's time."—Lindsey Liles







COME TO YOUR Senses

Sunshine warms your skin. Sand between your toes. The sip of your first cocktail. Live local music. When you're ready, come experience the sights, sounds and scents of the Alabama Gulf Coast. We've missed you.









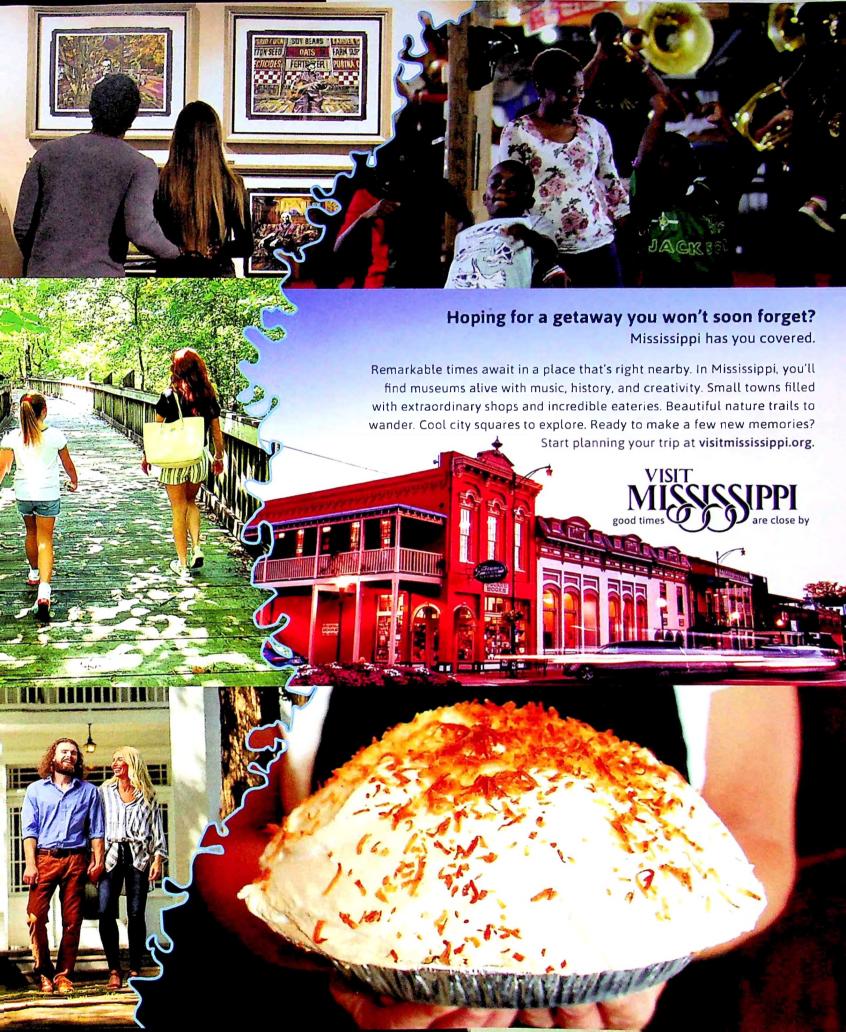
SOUTHERN FOCUS

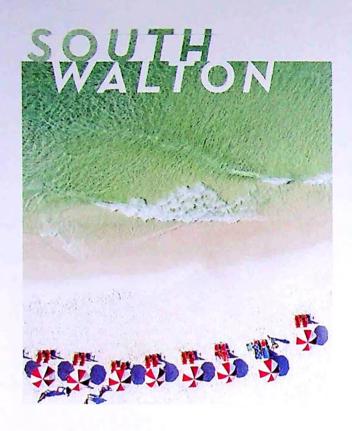


State of México, Mexico

Photograph by Medford Taylor

"When you're in the mountains in December, surrounded by millions of monarchs, it's almost a spiritual experience," Taylor says. He snapped this shot in a meadow between two slopes in the Cerro Pelon sanctuary, where a stream and morning dew attracted a group—also known as a flutter or a kaleidoscope—of monarchs. Toward winter's end, Taylor says, the butterflies become restless, preparing to migrate. This generation will make the journey's first leg up into Texas, breed, lay eggs on milkweed, and die. Those caterpillars will undergo metamorphosis, fly farther north through the South, and repeat; it can take up to five generations to reach as far as Canada by summertime. "The unbelievable thing," Taylor says, "is that final generation has never been anywhere near Mexico, yet they'll come to these same forests." It's an astounding three-thousand-mile journey, made by a single, and the same forests of the same forests of the same forests. The same forests of the same forests of the same forests of the same forests. The same forests of the same forests of the same forests of the same forests. The same forests of the same forests of the same forests of the same forests. The same forests of the same forests of the same forests of the same forests of the same forests. The same forests of the same forests. The same forests of the same forest of the same flonger-living "super generation." "I'd think about it as I was flying to Mexico on a jet going five hundred miles per hour. Somewhere below me, those little creatures were doing it on their wings."-L.L.







A LEGACY OF LEISURE

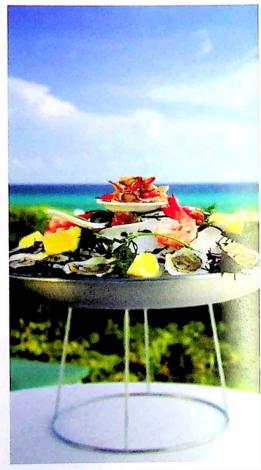
South Walton's 26 miles of sugar-white sand beaches in Northwest Florida offer an all-natural escape, yet perfectly blend modern amenities, world-class cuisine and small town charm into an unforgettable experience.

The days move a bit slower here, and it's this simplicity – a day spent creating memories at the beach – that draws generations of families back to South Walton.











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MEN'S ANGLER'S POLO

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A CELEBRATION OF SOUTHERN FOOD AND DRINK

ANATOMY OF A CLASSIC **Wild Grilling**

A WHOLE-FISH RECIPE FROM FLORIDA THAT'S PERFECT FOR THE BACKYARD

By Kim Severson

The surprises came fast when Jeffrey Jew left Washington, D.C., and started cooking on Florida's Gulf Coast, Jew, once a contestant on Top Chef, had gotten used to a steady supply of fruits and vegetables from Amish farmers in Pennsylvania. It was a different game in Florida, where he moved when his partner, Jim Steiner, took a community banking job nine years ago.

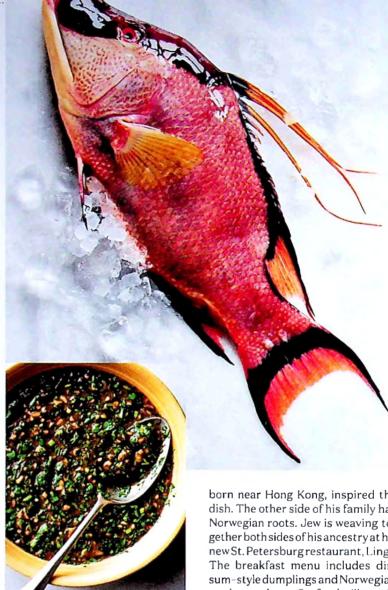
"It's so tough," Jew says. "You've got only four or five months when you get good produce, then it gets too hot."

He learned to adapt, sourcing locally as much as possible and immersing himself in the rhythms and limitations of Florida's seasonal fisheries.

"There are plenty of months when you can't even find grouper or mahi-mahi," he says. Fortunately, he discovered purveyors such as Sammy's Seafood in St. Petersburg, which focuses on fish caught in environmentally sensitive ways. That's how he fell in love with hogfish, a mild-tasting denizen of the waters around southern and central Florida. "It's a unique fish that has a real flavor to it and is very tender," he says.

Sometimes called hog snapper, though it's actually a member of the wrasse family, hogfish is perfect for summer grilling. Jew likes to grill the fish whole, using a variation of a recipe popular in Canton, China, where cooks douse steamed fish with ginger and cilantro swimming in soy sauce. Since finding a whole hogfish can be a challenge, he suggests substituting a two-tothree-pound red snapper, sea bass, or striped bass.

Jew's Chinese grandfather, a good cook who was



born near Hong Kong, inspired the dish. The other side of his family has Norwegian roots. Jew is weaving together both sides of his ancestry at his newSt. Petersburg restaurant, Lingr. The breakfast menu includes dim sum-style dumplings and Norwegian cardamom buns. Seafood will star in the evenings.

This simple recipe mixes global technique with an American backyard sensibility. Jew scores the fish and stuffs it with lemon, cilantro, and scallions, and whisks together an Asian vinaigrette that gets poured over just before serving. To keep the fish from sticking, clean the grill's grates well and oil them, and let the fish come to room temperature before placing it on the hot grill. Leave it undisturbed until you turn it, then flip the spatula upside down and apply pressure to the grate as you gently move it under the fish, using tongs to help turn.

It's surprisingly easy for a recipe that delivers big flavors and a splashy presentation. Best of all, it makes a great summer supper when the last thing a cook wants to do is spend time in a warm kitchen. "It just gets so hot down here," Jew says, "so you want something that doesn't take long to cook and that doesn't require an oven."

Grilled Whole Fish with Asian Vinaigrette

Yield: 2-4 servinas

INGREDIENTS For the fish: 1(21/2-to-3-lb.) whole hogfish, American red snapper, sea bass, or striped bass (scaled, gills removed, and cleaned) Kosher salt Hemon, sliced thinly 1/2 bunch cilantro. stemmed and roughly chopped 1/2 bunch scallions, cut into 1-inch pieces Butcher's twine. soaked in broth or water Grape-seed oil Black pepper

For the vinaigrette: 6 tbsp. vegetable oil 1tbsp. toasted sesame oil 2 tbsp. sweetened black vinegar 1tbsp. soy sauce Itbsp. hoisin sauce 1/2 bunch scallions, minced (about 1/3 cup) 4tbsp.ginger, minced 2 tbsp. garlic. minced 1/2 bunch cilantro, finely chopped (about 1/2 cup)

PREPARATION For the fish: Pat the fish dry, inside and out, and then score it on both sides. The cuts should be about ¼ inch deep and about linch apart.

Season the fish with salt inside the

Continues on p. 60





Downtown Charleston

Naples, FL | Palm Beach, FL | Charleston, SC | Greenville, SC | Highlands, NC | Aspen, CO





THE CHEF: **JEFFREY** JEW

Hometown: Washington, D.C., where both his parents were stationed at the Pentagon.

What he <u>learned from being</u> an army brat. "My parents were strict, so you learn a lot of discipline, for sure."

What he would grab from the kitchen if the house was on fire: A fish knife his Norwegian grandfather gave him when he was a child.

Continued from p. 58

cavity and on both sides of the skin, then stuff with lemon, cilantro, and scallions. (It's easiest to line the inside of the cavity with lemon slices, then add cilantro and then scallions. Then tuck in any remaining

lemon slices.)

Tie the fish in 2 or 3 places with butcher's twine to secure the stuffing. Place the fish on a large plate or sheet pan and brush both sides heavily with grape-seed oil. Let the fish rest for about 30 minutes at room temperature.

Brush the grates of a grill well, and oil them with a paper towel soaked in grape-seed or vegetable oil. Heat grill to about 500°F. If you're using a charcoal grill, it's ready when you can hold your hand over the grate for only 2 or 3 seconds.

Brush the fish again

with any oil that has pooled on the bottom of the plate. Carefully put fish on the grill. If using a gas grill, turn heat to medium and close the lid. If using a charcoal grill, do not cover once you place the fish on the grill. Cook for about 7 to 10 minutes, depending

on the thickness of the fish.

Using a metal spatula and tongs, carefully flip the fish and cook for another 7 to 10 minutes.

Transfer to a serving platter, grind some black pepper over the fish, and then whisk the vinaigrette one

more time and pour it over the hot fish

For the vinaigrette: Whisk the oils together in a bowl. Add vinegar, soy sauce, and hoisin sauce, whisking well after each to emulsify. Whisk in scallions, ginger, garlic, and cilantro.

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DRINKS

Whiskey Shiver

THE WELCOME CHILL FACTOR OF THE FROZEN IRISH COFFEE

By Wayne Curtis

he Irish coffee was invented in the 1940s near Shannon, Ireland, and made the leap to the United States in the 1950s, when the Buena Vista Cafe in San Francisco made it famous. The drink then swiftly showed up in restaurants around the nation, but the full story of its rise is complicated and contentious, involving competing claims of airport bartenders and Irish publicans, and disputes over cream versus whipped cream. Too much to get into here.

But know this: The piping-hot concoction of coffee, cream, and Irish whiskey would soon collide with another drink trend, and to the good fortune of all. ice cream blender drinks hit their stride in the seventies and eighties, a time when classic cocktails were dismissed as dull and stodgy. Bartenders decided that every drink could be upgraded with a blender and a scoop or two of ice cream.

And so came the Cognac Creme Freeze, the White Monkey, the Pink Macaroon, and Scarlett's Comfort, the last of which featured Southern Comfort, blackberry brandy, cranberry juice, blueberries, and ice cream. (Do not try this at home unless you are a licensed mixologist.) The ice cream cocktail phase is not considered one of the high points in modern bartending. In any event, a more health-conscious era soon rushed in, and consumers migrated en masse to white wine spritzers and lite beer, leaving boozy milkshakes behind.

With one noteworthy exception: the frozen Irish coffee.

Popular lore ascribes the invention of the frozen Irish coffee to Jim Monaghan Sr., the proprietor of multiple French Quarter bars in New Orleans, notably Molly's at the Market, where the frozen Irish first appeared in the 1980s. When the Erin Rose, another of Monaghan's bars, installed a slushy machine in 2000, frozen Irish coffee entered the machine and essentially never left.



Monaghan died in 2001, but his drink has long outlived its creator. It's even developed a near-cult status thanks in large part to the hordes of cocktail apprentices who swarm the city most summers to sling drinks at the massive Tales of the Cocktail conference, and who have come to rely on the whiskey jolt and coffee boost between shifts. (If the slushy machine were to break down, it's assumed the conference would face considerable peril.)

One of the splendors of the drink is that it invites riffs. Nickel City, a neo-dive bar in Austin, Texas, offers its Almost Famous Frozen Irish Coffee, made with Tullamore D.E.W. and a proprietary cream blend. Bon Ton, a Viet-Cajun joint in Atlanta, serves a Vietnamese frozen Irish coffee, with whiskey, coffee brandy, sweetened condensed milk, and chicory coffee.

But one needn't trifle with perfection. And you needn't own a slushy machine-just a blender and a willingness to abandon any diet you may have agreed to in a moment of weakness. Made right, the frozen Irish coffee offers minor stimulation and an impressive if temporary relief from the Southern summer. Go-cup optional. @

Frozen Irish Coffee

Yield: Lcocktail

INGREDIENTS

2 oz. Irish whiskey 2 oz. coffee liqueur 1/2 cup vanilla ice cream 2 cups ice cubes 4 oz. rich chilled coffee

PREPARATION

Put all ingredients in a blender and run until the mixture is the consistency of a thin milkshake. Serve in a rocks glass (or a footed Irish coffee glass for show) Garnish with a dusting of coffee grounds.

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The author holds a Moon and Stars and Ancient Crookneck cross she and her partner grew in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

HARVEST

A Taste for Heirlooms

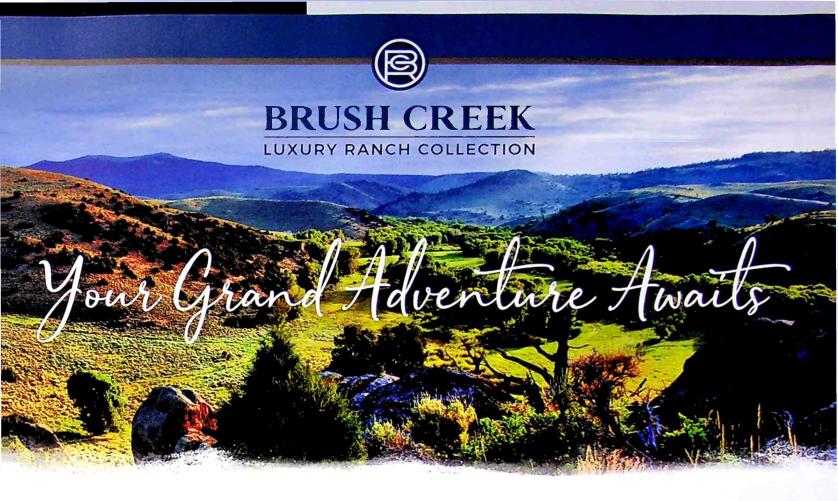
A PAIR OF VIRGINIA GROWERS DIG INTO THE SOUTH'S SWEETEST WATERMELONS

By Debra Freeman

y grandmother used to laugh and say that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. She mainly used that quip whenever I told her some obscure fact I'd read, like why women's shirts button on the left. Although she's passed on, I can imagine her saying that now about my obsession with heirloom watermelons.

It all started two years ago after I read about the famed Bradford watermelon. Nathaniel Napoleon Bradford crossed two watermelons—the Lawson and the Mountain Sweet - to create the variety in the 1800s. By the 1860s, many considered the Bradford the most important watermelon in the South, praised for its sweetness and with a rind so soft, most of it could be eaten. Unfortunately, it fell out of favor by the early 1920s as watermelons that could ship more easily began dominating the market. But today, a descendant named Nat Bradford has revived it at his farm in Sumter, South Carolina. Early in the 2019 season, 1 preordered two Bradford melons online and talked my partner, Joshua "Fitz" Fitzwater, into taking a road trip with me from our Richmond home to pick them up later that summer. As Fitz is a foodie, this wasn't a difficult sell.

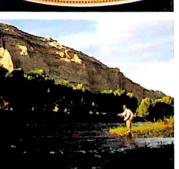
While waiting for our Bradfords, we started wondering what other kinds of heirloom watermelons we were missing out on. Visits to local farmers' markets turned into weekend journeys to North Carolina to hunt down a Crimson Sweet, to northern Pennsylvania for an Ancient Crookneck, to Delaware for an Ali Baba, and almost everywhere else within driving distance. They all had variations in texture and sweetness, and afterawhile, we could detect notes of apricot and honey, for example, in different types. We tracked down an Odell's White, the only commercial variety of watermelon attributed to an African American. His name was Harry, and he was possibly enslaved by William Summer, a pomologist in South Carolina (the melon's name came from Milton Odell, who grew it in the 1850s). We shared those seeds with African American farmers in Virginia, and they were as shocked as we were to learn about the variety-and happy to plant them in their fields.



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From left: Joshua Fitzwater harvests one of the Virginiagrown melons; a stash of heirloom watermelon seeds: the author with an Ancient Crookneck

The more we tasted, the more we began to wonder why we couldn't find any prominent varieties with distinctly Virginian roots, even though watermelons have been grown here for centuries. Of course we saved seeds from all of the melons we'd found, and we began talking about planting some the following season. Though we live in the middle of the city, the Patawomeck tribe had some land available about fifty miles north in Fredericksburg, and they were gracious enough to allow us to use a portion. We decided to plant the Ancient Crookneck, an heirloom indigenous people in Arizona had grown. We also planted the Ali Baba, which originated in Iraq; the Ledmon, from North Carolina; and the Moon and Stars, a speckled heirloom rediscovered in Missouri. Perhaps more important, Fitz began experimenting with crossing different varieties through hand pollination, including a cross we named the Double A Sweet, combining the crisp texture of the Ancient Crookneck and the sweetness of the Ali Baba.

We planted roughly sixty seeds and started making the two-hour round trip to make sure the plants were thriving, enlisting help from Fitz's father and my daughter to add bone and blood meal, mushroom compost, cow manure, and worm castings to the soil. While tending to our plants, I played Ella Fitzgerald for them as Fitz uncoiled the solitary hose to hand water each melon, fighting off mosquitoes and heat rash in ninety-degree swelter.

As first-time growers, we agreed that if even a handful of those seeds matured, we would count it as a win. We wound up with almost a hundred watermelons. Most grew to about twenty-five pounds, though several ballooned to more than thirty-five, and our thoughts



soon turned to how best to use the ripening fruit. We brought watermelons to several Virginia chefs, including pitmaster Floyd Thomas of Redwood Smoke Shack in Norfolk and chef Forrest Warren of Smoke BBQ Restaurant & Bar in Newport News, Thomas worked them into a hot sauce with habanero and lime, and Warren into a vinegar-and-watermelon barbecue sauce, and we quickly sold the rest after a couple of Facebook posts and a tweet that went viral. Clearly, we weren't the only ones who wanted a taste from the past.

This year, we have decided to grow heirloom watermelons once again. Fitz is replanting seeds from the best of our Double A Sweets. It takes three years for the traits to fully develop, and we're excited to see which characteristics will carry over. And we're now cross-pollinating three different types—the Bradford, the Odell's White, and the Ledmon-in hopes of eventually producing another Virginia watermelon from some of the sweetest heirlooms in the South.

Over the past two years, our hobby has grown into a full-fledged passion. It was deeply satisfying to bring joy to people we had never met before. Hopefully in the first fleeting moment when they tasted that liquid sugar on their tongues, they might've briefly forgotten about a global pandemic while also learning a bit of Southern culinary history. And perhaps one day soon, we Virginians will have a watermelon we can call our own. My grandmother might just approve.



Silvercrest is an independent investment advisory and financial services firm created to provide traditional and alternative asset management to wealthy families and select institutional investors.

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and owner of Revival in Decatur, Georgia,

and Gunshow in Atlanta. "Granny grewlady peas. Her neighbor grew Silver Queen. So they swapped. She got the grandkids to do the work because we knew there was fried corn for dinner if we did!" Developed in the 1950s, Silver Queen gained rock-star produce status in the South thanks to its sweet white kernels. It has become harder to find as other sweet varieties have come about, but it's worth seeking out in June and July. "There's just a lot of nostalgia and anticipation about Silver Queen season," Gillespie says. "Even raw you can taste the sweetness, while yellow corn can taste tannic and bitter raw. It also has more crunch, a plump kernel, and doesn't get mushy as quickly." When you find Silver Queen at a farmers' market or a roadside stand, make sure there's no space between the kernels (this tells you the moisture content is optimal), and choose smaller ears, which tend to be sweetest. "And look for indications of worms or bugs," Gillespiesays. "They love Silver Queen, too." Store the ears in the crisper drawer, in their husks, and eat within a few days. Gillespie likes to cut the kernels off the cob and steamor saute them to add to a summer salad. Or he'll dunk the whole ears in water and charthem on a smoking hot grill. But his favorite prep is to fry the kernels with a bit of fatback-just as Granny Geneva taught him many summers ago. 🖸

THE CHEF RECOMMENDS:

Fatback-Fried Silver Queen Corn

Yield: 4 servings

INGREDIENTS

3 ears Silver Queen corn, husks and silk removed 3 oz. fatback, minced (available at most butcher shops) 1/4 cup onion, finely minced 2 tbsp. heavy cream 2 tsp. kosher salt 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper 1/2 tsp. lemon juice

PREPARATION Grate com on the largest holes of a box grater (you'll end up with about 2 cups of grated kernels). In a large skillet over medium heat, cook the fatback to render the fat, about 2 to 3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, put fried fatback on a plate and set aside. Transfer the rendered fat to a small metal bowl. Put 2 tbsp. of fat into the skillet and heat over medium-high. Add onion and corn and cook for 30 seconds, tossing so they won't stick. Add cream, salt, and pepper, and cook using the washing machine method (hold your spoon in the center and shake or rotate the pan vigorously to quickly mix everything together). When the mixture thickens (the corn will bind into one big clump), remove from heat and stir until hubbles subside If mixture is too thick for you, add a few drops of water to thin it. Stir in lemon juice and serve immediately. Garnish with minced fried fatback.

TIP: Grating the kernels off the cob extracts the pulp. which contains the bulk of Silver Queen's flavor. Grate over a bowl to prevent kernels from scattering over the counter.

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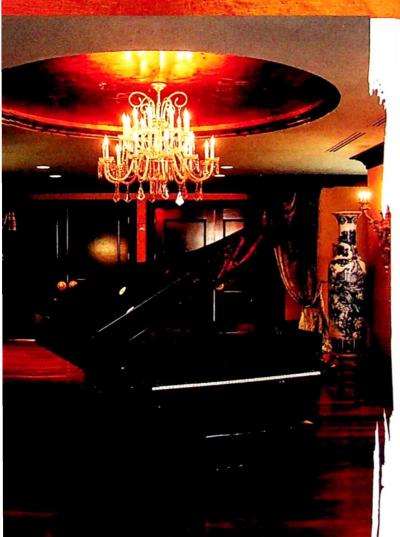
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BY JOHN T, EDGE

Rocket City's Jamaican Flair

IN RAPIDLY GROWING HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA, GET A TASTE OF THE DEEPER SOUTH

Mark and Karen

Blake at the order

Jamaican Restau-

rant; Winston Blake

cooks jerk chicken on

a barrel grill outside.

counter of M&K





usiness cards for Island Twelve Shipping and Nicole Nickerson, "North Alabama's Jamaican Realtor," share counter space. A Bible open to Psalms lies alongside. "Exodus," the Bob Marley classic, lopes through ceiling speakers. A delivery driver, here to pick up foam boxes of braised oxtails, buys a pair of miniature boxing gloves

embossed with the Jamaican flag. Soon, they will sway from his rearview mirror as he drives the Friday lunchtime streets of Huntsville, Alabama.

M&K Jamaican Restaurant began about four years ago at a nearby gas station. Today it's the most vital among an array of Caribbean restaurants in this fast-growing and quickly diversifying city that pulses

with new arrivals. Opposite a car dealership, next to a vape shop, husband-and-wife owners Mark and Karen $Blake \, now \, work \, a \, strip \, mall \, store front \, decorated \, with \,$ reggae star glossies and a poster of the 2002 Jamaican bobsled team.

From a galley kitchen, they dish goat roti, fried plantains, curry chicken, and coconut rice and peas. They bake patties stuffed with pebbled beef and wrapped in turmeric-yellow crusts. Outside, Winston Blake, Mark's father, tends a barrel grill beneath a carport. By noon, charcoal smoke curls from under the eaves, and fragrant jerk chicken, sticky with an all spice-scented hot sauce, follows.

Huntsville has been a different sort of Alabama city since the World War II era. After developing V-2

rockets for the Nazis, Wernher von Braun and his team came here to work for the U.S. Army. They stayed to build the rockets that propelled America to the moon. Rocket making still draws smart people to work at the Army's Redstone Arsenal and NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center. I-laitians who left Austin, Texas, for the next tech boomtown now flock to M&K. Cam-

eroonians who work in cybersecurity come for their snapper escabeche fixes.

If you know Jamaican food, then you know jerk, the most popular island export after reggae. Southern barbecue and Jamaican jerk are not the same. But they have comparable histories. Caribbean colonies and the U.S. South enslaved people. In Alabama, the

Jerk Station

Fuel up with a plate of chicken

The Blakes opened their first restaurant beneath the overhang of a gas station on University Drive in Huntsville. Today, at Jam Rock Jamaican Restaurant, the Walker family works the space, cooking jerk chicken that smells of woodsmoke and allspice. Inside, they sell Jamaican snacks like plantain chips and bottles of grapefruit-y Ting -J.T.E.

money crop was cotton. In Jamaica, it was sugar. Like Southern foodways, Caribbean foodways bear those markers. Jerk chicken claims likely roots in the seventeenth century, when enslaved Jamaicans fled to the mountains to escape the British. Curry goat, which the Blakes serve in a velvet sauce with potatoes and carrots, borrows spicing from indentured Indian workers who came to work sugarcane plantations after the British outlawed colonial slavery. And their brown stew chicken gains deep flavor and color from caramelized sugar.

Mark and Karen grew up in Manchester Parish in Jamaica. They came to the United States on track scholarships. At Bethune-Cookman University, an HBCU in Florida, Karen ran middle distance and cross-country. Mark was a sprinter and long jumper. He managed car rental agencies and she worked as a special education teacher before they moved to Huntsville and launched their restaurant. They opened the current location of M&K in 2019, aided by Winston Blake, who had run a restaurant back in Manchester Parish.

Today, these three serve the new-economy workers of Huntsville, drawn by tech and space industry jobs, and those who come to study at a constellation of educational institutions, including Oakwood University, a Seventh Day Adventist-funded HBCU, a mile and a half down the road from M&K.

Set on a former cotton plantation, Oakwood has educated many Caribbean people, drawn by scholarships and church connections, and many now call Huntsville home. Oakwood is storied ground. Dred Scott, the enslaved man who famously and unsuccessfully petitioned the Supreme Court for his freedom, once toiled there. After the Civil War, the church converted the plantation to a school, to serve the needs of the once enslaved.

At the prow of the campus, the university sells student-grown vegetables from what looks like a mod Whole Foods branch. The Blakes cook with vegetables raised by Oakwood farmers, and they serve dishes that appeal to vegetarians and vegans. But my favorite dish on their menu is the meatiest.

On a recent Saturday, a sign posted to

the plexiglass order window announced that oxtails are now subject to a one-dollar surcharge. "The meat has gotten expensive," Mark says. "But we don't want to give it up." My advice: Pay the freight. Braised until they shade black and gain auburn highlights, these nuggets of beef taste like beatified mini pot roasts. As the oxtails cook, they throw off a rich onion-sweet gravy. In a boxed meal, that gravy soaks into the coconut rice and peas. It swamps the creamy mix of potatoes and chickpeas. And it gilds ingots of plantain, cooked until they turn golden and chewy.

M&K is a portal. Cross the transom, fork into the oxtails, and you travel to Jamaica. Take in the sounds and smells, and you also get to glimpse the Huntsville of the future, a place many people from many places will call home. In 2018, Huntsville passed Montgomery in population. By 2023, it is poised to pass Birmingham. As the city grows and newpeoplearrive, M&K will serve as a clubhouse for all, with a better sound track than most, and oxtail gravy that begs you to sop to the bottom of the box.



A Beloved Blue Ridge Getaway

IN HIGHLANDS, NORTH CAROLINA, BLOGGER VICTORIA SCHNEIDER CHECKS INTO THE OLD EDWARDS INN AND SPA FOR A COZY—AND RELAXING—RETREAT

W

estern North Carolina holds a special place in the hearts of those who visit, and amid this mountainous wonderland lies an enclave especially favored by travelers. Tucked within a Blue Ridge plateau, Highlands brims with natural beauty, while an idyllic, small-town feel permeates its down-

town streets. At the heart of it all, the Old Edwards Inn and Spa, with its plush suites, world-class spa, and collection of restaurants, is a cornerstone of the community. This past spring, *Garden & Gun* partnered with Atlanta-based photographer and lifestyle blogger Victoria Schneider to capture the Old Edwards experience in full.

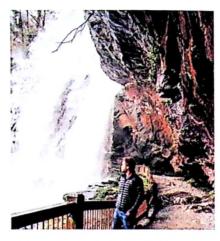
Upon arrival in Highlands, Victoria and her husband, lan, were struck by the village's close-knit atmosphere. "It felt familiar right away, like everyone knew us," she says. With time to kill before their check-in at Old Edwards, the Schneiders traveled a mere ten minutes to two of the area's most treasured sights: Dry Falls and Bridal Veil Falls. The twin attractions are wonders to behold. At Dry Falls, visitors can wander behind the falls for a stunning mountain vista—and a light spray.

Back at the inn, Victoria and langot acquainted with their room after touring the grounds. "Each space seemed more lovely than the last," Victoria says of the inn's stylish European design. The Satulah Suite was warm and welcoming, with heated floors, a luxurious bathtub, and a charming view of Main Street. In the evenings, the turndown service was divine, leaving the fireplace aglow and the room sprinkled with rose petals.

The next day, breakfast was served at Madison's Restaurant, an Old Edwards eatery with fare sourced from local farmers, and by midmorning, it was time for some pampering at the spa. Victoria enjoyed the Sweet Mountain Metamorphosis, one of the inn's signature massages, as well as a light lunch in the Spa Café and time to lounge in the sunroom with lan.

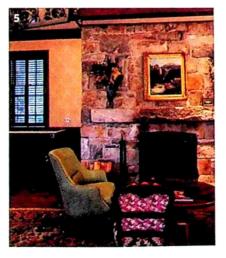
With the remainder of their weekend, the Schneiders set out to savor the best of Highlands, including a trip to the Bascom Center for Visual Arts, a horse farm turned gallery space; a spinthrough downtown's boutiques; and drinks at the Hummingbird Lounge, the inn's laid-back cocktail joint. But the couple's weekend adventure only scratched the surface of Old Edwards's delights. "This seems like the kind of place that has a unique feel for each season," Victoria says. "We're already planning our next trip."

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l. Victoria's husband, lan, explores Dry Falls.
2. A slow morning in the Satulah Suite. 3. The charming entry to Madison's Restaurant.
4. A classic Southern breakfast at Madison's Restaurant. 5. A cozy corner at Old Edwards.
6. Victoria takes a dip in the Hickory Jacuzzi.



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MUSICAL RENAISSANCE MAN JON BATISTE CAN TRACE HIS LIFE IN MUSIC WITH MELODICAS

By Jonathan Miles

Batiste at his home in New Jersey, playing one of his hand-painted melodicas.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WINNIE AU

GARDENKGUN JUNE / JULY 2021 75



on Batiste's professors at the Juilliard School in New York were so disturbed by it that they called in a psychotherapist. One of his hometown mentors, the jazz icon Wynton Marsalis, was likewise appalled. "Get that thing off the stage," he'd gripe. Even workaday subway riders, herding past Batiste's underground performances,

might've thought something was off-kilter, unusual, all that incredible virtuosity funneled into...what's that thing even called, anyway?

"Melody horn, melodion, harmonichord, mouth piano..." Batiste is inventorying the names for the peculiar instrument in his hands, the source of all that former tension but also, more important, almost lifelong delight. "If you look online," he says, "there's even more." Indeed there are: pianica, melodihorn, triola, hooter, piano horn, and the rather sultry-sounding orgamonica. But most players, Batiste included, call it a melodica.

Few if any players, however, have devoted as much passion and energy to the instrument-and derived so much obstinate joy from it—as Batiste. The thirtyfour-year-old Louisiana native is a wearer of many feathered caps: bandleader, since 2015, for The Late Show with Stephen Colbert; Oscar-nominated and Golden Globe-winning film composer (for Pixar's Soul); jazz piano prodigy turned master, with more than a dozen albums and EPs stretching back to his teens (including 2019's Grammy-nominated Chronology of a Dream: Live at the Village Vanguard); actor (David Simon's Treme and Spike Lee's Red Hook Summer); symphonic composer (his American Symphony debuts at Carnegie Hall this year); educator (he's the co-artistic director of the National Jazz Museum in Harlem); and activist (the protest marches he led in the wake of George Floyd's killing fueled the songwriting on We Are, his most recent album). But close to Batiste's heart is another, less heralded role; evangelist and ambassador for this many-named German instrument that resembles the offspring of a piano and a kazoo and that finally, in his hands, is getting the respect and exposure it deserves.

<mark>"It's</mark> still very much an underground instrument," Batiste says. He's standing in the garage of his house on a rural New Jersey back road, plucking half a dozen melodicas from a moving box. Batiste and his longtime partner, the writer Suleika Jaouad, recently traded their New York apartment for a patch of countryside; cardboard boxes still linger. This box, however, has a special resonance: It's the repository for a stubborn love that began, way back when, with a consolation gift from his father.

The year was 1993. As the bassist for the Batiste Brothers Band, Jon's father, Michael, was jetting to Japan for a gig. (Batiste descends from one of those mu-<mark>sical fa</mark>milies, like the Marsalises and Nevilles, thread ed into the very DNA of New Orleans music.) Jon, who at seven was already performing with his family some, wanted desperately to come along. Though not because hewanted to be on stage. "Japan," he explains, "was the land of Nintendo." Where he remained, however, was in the land of second grade. Batiste pere returned bearing gifts. Among them, for Jon, was a melodica—a ubiquitous classroom instrument in Japan, but, for a boy in Louisiana, an object of wild fascination. "That was the beginning," he says.

That first melodica's not in the moving box; it's back at the family homeplace in Kenner. What is here, though, is a hand-painted relic from the next chapter in Jon Batiste's melodica odyssey-"the era of the subway," as he puts it. He brings it to his lips and pipes out a quick bluesy run. Festooned with his name amid black and lime-green patterns painted by a friend, the thirtytwo-key Hohner model is emblematic of Batiste's near-constant sidearm when he was studying piano at Juilliard by day and - on street corners and in subways and jazz clubs-mastering the melodica by night.

Melodicas can be played in one of two ways. The first is to blow into a long plastic tube connected to the instrument, which can be set level with the keyboard visible to the player and with both of his or her

From left, a handpainted melodica, the Supreme Hohner version Batiste played at a Tiny Desk concert for NPR, and a model he played in the New York City subway.



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GOOD HUNTING

Unlike, say, vintage guitars, melodicas don't hold much intrinsic value. For Batiste, however, each one in his collection is a madeleine, a portal back to a moment in time



hands free to navigate it. The effect is something like a musical hookah pipe. The second way—Jon's—is to eschew the tubing and blow it like a trumpet, fingering the keys with one's right hand while—if you're Jon Batiste—dancing, discoing, duckwalking, and otherwise distributing the groove throughout your entire body. The sound a melodica produces is reedy and expressive, similar to a harmonica but without so much of the overtones and glissandi—like a harmonica played with uncanny precision.

It's not entirely unknown in popular music. The late Augustus Pablo introduced it to reggae and dub in the 1970s. Steely Dan's Donald Fagen toots one on occasion. Stevie Wonder told Batiste he used to play one but didn't like the way it clogged with saliva (melodicas do require draining). But like its cousins the harmonica and the accordion, the instrument often gets seated at the kids' table—scorned as an unserious folk instrument or, worse yet, as a toy. Suffice it to say that it wasn't what you wanted to go around playing nonstop in the very serious halls of Juilliard, even if the cafeteria ladies loved it so much that they rewarded you with free food.

"The teachers in the school started saying, 'That boy has lost his mind," Batiste recalls. "I even had to get a psychiatric exam." The institutional disdain, he says, was partly musical; snobbery, after all, is endemic to conservatory life. Playing for free in the subways, haunting empty jazz clubs in the wee hours, diverting even any energy from the rigors of his piano study: "All that was looked down upon," he says. Yet the frowns had another source, he believes: "The fact that I'm Southern." His New Orleans accent is deep and melodious; back then, it was even deeper. "There were no people who spoke like I spoke at Juilliard at that time," he says. "There weren't a lot of people I could point to who sounded like Willie up the block. Everything about me was just like, This guy's a sore thumb." He's laughing as he says this-that big staccato laugh familiar to television viewers. "It wasn't funny at the time," he allows, "but in retrospect it's hilarious."

Equally funny—now but not then—was Wynton Marsalis's allergic reaction to Batiste's melodica playing. Marsalis feared he was wasting his talent on a toy, Batiste says. "He's the biggest jazz star in the world. The guy. And he's saying, 'Don't play that." The two of them laugh about it now. Back then, however: "I would just clench," he says, "and keepit." That's because the melodica brought him joy. And, increasingly, it was bringing audiences joy. The jazz clubs, where he'd lead off with a melodica rendition of Thelonious Monk's "'Round Midnight," backed by the earliest members of his Stay Human band, were no longer empty but instead packed. The Lower East Sidestreet corners, where the band staged the guerrilla concerts that Batiste would come to call "love riots," were swelling with crowds.

He pulls another melodica from the box, a Suzuki soprano model that's another heirloom from the sub-



way era. Unlike, say, vintage guitars, melodicas don't hold much intrinsic value. They're mass-produced, not handcrafted. Most are made of plastic. When the reeds go flat, as they inevitably do, it's usually time for a new one. For Batiste, however, each one in his collection is a madeleine, a portal back to a moment in time. That late night on Ludlow Street when an audience of hundreds snarled traffic and the police broke it up, blue lights everywhere, amid chants for one more song. That appearance on a television show he'd never heard of, The Colbert Report, when Batiste and the band second-lined the audience out of the studio and onto the sidewalk and into Stephen Colbert's heart. The march through Manhattan that he led last summer, decrying injustice with song, fusing street protests with the jazz funeral. Or that 2008 NBA All-Star Game halftime show when the "youngster," as Harry Connick Jr. dubbed him, was included in a performance medley by New Orleans' pianotitans-Connick Jr., Ellis Marsalis, Dr. John, Art Neville, and, across from Batiste, dueling pianosstyle, Allen Toussaint-and what did he do? Whipped out a melodica during the closing breakdown, unannounced, unrehearsed, because maybe the only response to that much sonic joy is to add another layer of sonic joy, to dash in some of your own seasoning mix. to make the funk somehow funkier.

"A lot of times," he says, "the culture needs to be shook up." Batiste continues to shake it every which way he can. But he's especially proud, as the array of melodicas loosens more memories, of the decade-old judder he gave the New York jazz scene, the way he helped pivot the music back toward its New Orleans roots and rejuvenated it with that so-called toy. "Because ten years later I see musicians who are not from New Orleans, not from the South, adopting things that we did in clubs and other venues and it's like, Ohyes," he says, smiling. "That helped the culture. That helped something."

Batiste at the piano, topped with awards including his Golden Globe for Soul.











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SOUTHERN STYLE

The Art of the Sleeping Porch

WIND DOWN WITH FLAIR IN THIS NOSTALGIC SUMMERTIME HAVEN
By Haskell Harris



Back before air-conditioning, the Southern sleeping porch served not only as a novelty, particularly for children who thrilled to snoozing outside, but as a necessity. On summer nights, when the air inside a home became stifling, families retreated to these welcome spots—often repurposed screened-in porches—to drift off to sleep in makeshift seasonal beds. Sleeping porches have even appeared in such films as 1991's Louisiana-set *The Man in the Moon*, in which a young Reese Witherspoon stays up late in just such a structure with her character's older sister to muse about life. To keep the tradition from fading into the HVAC ether, you don't need much more than a few key ingredients.





■ BEDDING

Crisp white sheets with a subtle, menswear-inspired charcoal stripe by Matouk (from \$225; matouk.com), handmade coverlets by Texas-based Vaeven (\$1,250 each; vaeven.com), macrame bed skirts by Serena & Lily (from \$138; serenaandlily .com), and a wildly colorful cotton throw by the artist Olivia Wendel (\$170; ggfieldshop .com) lend a light and cool look to nestled twin beds.

SIDE TABLE, LAMP. AND STEREO

The designers at Worlds Away in Memphis dreamed up this gunmetal-gray side table with clever storage concealed behind caned-panel doors (\$1,215; worlds-away.com). The sturdy piece also offers a handy perch for a vintage-style lamp by Schoolhouse Electric (from \$329; schoolhouse.com) as well as a Bluetooth stereo in a decidedly retro package by Tivoli Audio (\$899; huckberry.com).

■ STOOLS, RUG, AND FAN

Keep things casual with relaxed organic materials like those used to craft both the woven-water-hyacinth stools by Mainly Baskets Home (\$258 each; mainlybaskets.com) and the quirky jute area rug by Serena & Lily (\$148; serenaandlily.com). An oldschool standing fan by Hunter (\$90; sylvane.com) maintains a steady breeze in the still of the night.

TRAY, CARAFE, AND DRINKWARE

A bamboo tray like this one from Dear Keaton (\$34; dearkeaton.com), stocked with a carafe and water glass set from Fieldshop (\$66: ggfieldshop .com) and enamel tumblers by Crow Canyon (\$10-\$22 each; crowcanyonhome.com) that you can fill with chilled cocktails, makes for an easily movable hydration station. 🖸



From top: A custom sofa by Angie Hranowsky Studio anchors the living room, accompanied by a rattan chair by John Risley and a Billy Baldwin Studio slipper chair covered in Schumacher fabric; the foyer seen through the front entrance.



HOMEPLACE

Charleston Gem

VIVID HUES AND BEGUILING UPDATES SET A HISTORIC LOWCOUNTRY HOME APART

By Allston McCrady



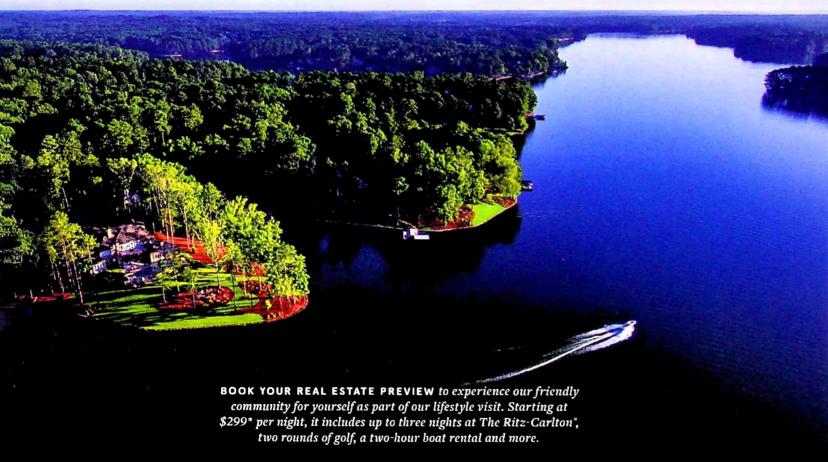
round every corner, the historic district of Charleston, South Carolina, reveals or conceals a secret. A hidden cobblestoned alley. A pocket garden spied through an elaborate iron gate. And if you were to walk by the diminutive eighteenth-century kitchen house set back from King Street just south

of Broad Street, you might not even notice that its understated brick exterior disguises a boldly modern addition, largely invisible to the prying eyes of passersby.

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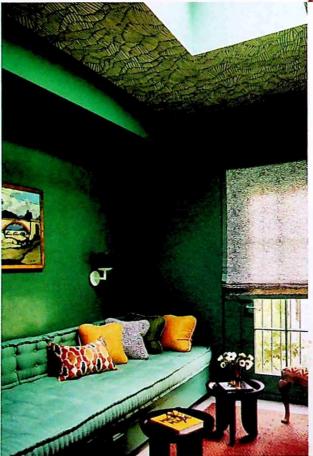
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GOOD HUNTING

At the time of its construction in 2015, the two-story addition ruffled feathers, as even the slightest tweak south of Broad often does. When the then homeowners put the house on the market after the dust had settled, Liz Gilbert and Ron Hammer snapped it up. The Connecticut couple, retired from careers in finance, had been searching for the ideal pied-à-terre, and this was it: discreetly set back from the street, quiet, in the historic district, but with state-of-the-art features and parking to boot.

Technically, the former kitchen house once belonged to the stately three-story manor house just north of it. The merchant and planter William Price constructed both in 1786. In that century and the next, hundreds of similar kitchen houses, where enslaved people lived and worked, peppered the inner blocks of Charleston, built at a distance from the main homes so as not to catch them on fire. Over the decades, the property



Top to bottom: A vintage uchiwa light fixture by Ingo Maurer hangs in the breakfast room; a custom-made daybed outfits the TV room, which doubles as a guest room; another view of the living room, and a vintage Danish lounge chair reupholstered in nubby wool.



changed hands many times-during World War II, the kitchen house even got remodeled into apartments for war workers, and the structure had been practically gutted by the time of the modern addition. Today roughly a third of the original kitchen houses on this block survive, typically "absorbed" by the main house as a subsequently hyphenated wing or guesthouse. But in this case, the kitchen house was legally split from the parent house in 1964 and given its own lot, for which its owners could call their own shots. Which Gilbert and Hammer did, stylistically catapulting the home into the present.

"When we first walked in," Gilbert says, "we were really struck by the juxtaposition between old and new." The architect the former homeowners had used had





"When you commit to working with color," says interior designer Angie Hranowsky, "you have to go all the way





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GOOD HUNTING



Hranowsky played off of the old-new dichotomyof the house itself, assembling an inspired mix of antiques and modern pieces



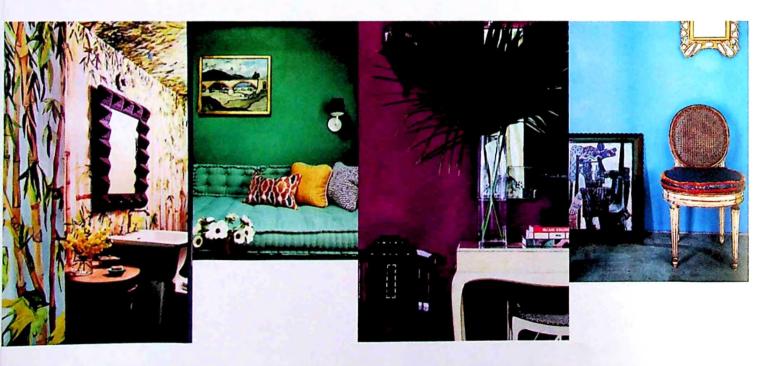
Left to right, from top: A custom headboard and bedding by Angie Hranowsky Studio in the master bedroom; custom wallpaper panels by Voutsain the powder room; a vintage French painting from Charleston's Wynsum Antiques & Interiors; a vintage Moroccan side chair from John Pope Antiques in the foyer; a nineteenth-century Louis XVI chair with custom seat cushions.



exposed the original brick walls, hidden behind drywall for decades. He then floated a contemporary staircase at the center of the historic frame, flanked by a kitchen, with modern bathrooms above. Openings connect westward to a spacious, light-filled addition framed with a "window wall" overlooking a private garden. "It's like a tree house," Gilbert says as a brilliant red cardinal lands in a blossoming redbud tree.

Charleston's subtropical climate attracted Gilbert

and Hammer, a welcome respite from New England winters. Gilbert had recently renovated a charming Nantucket-style barn in shades of white and blue, but as a self-professed "colorist at heart," she knew that in Charleston, she wanted to use color in confident and surprising ways. Serendipitously, she stumbled upon the Charleston-based interior designer Angie Hranowsky, whose signature bold palette and eclectic style spoke to her. Hranowsky toured the space and



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GOOD HUNTING

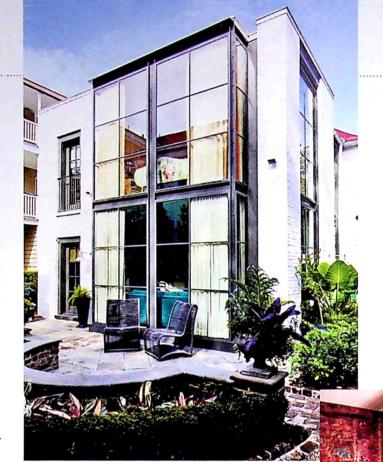
agreed that although the modern addition was striking, as she puts it, "it felt like a big, empty white box. It needed warmth and texture." Gilbert gave her free rein. "When you commit to working with color," Hranowsky says, "you sort of have to go all the way. Luckily, Liz was willing to take risks."

From the street, the house blends perfectly with its historic surroundings, its brick facade painted pristine white and lined with meticulously clipped fig ivy. But the front door opens into a virtual jewel box. Richly saturated vibrant pink, deep red, and salmon imbue the walls, hallways, and stairwell. Upstairs, a petite guest wing doubles as a television room, enveloped in shades of kelly green and pistachio and dappled with sun from a retractable skylight. The airy main bedroom offers custom bedding and amiable hues of peach and buttery custard. Hranowsky enlisted a faux finisher to glaze the walls, lending a bit of movement to coloration throughout the home, so everything breathes. Little pops of Voutsa fabric and custom wallpapers echothe subtropical feel, the downstairs half bath wrapped in a fictional grove of bamboo.

When selecting furniture, Hranowsky played off of the old-new dichotomy of the house itself, assembling an inspired mix of antiques and modern pieces, accented by custom designs such as the tufted French mattress daybed with a pullout trundle in the TV/guest

From top: The back of the home showcases the modern addition; another view of the foyer and the structure's original brick walls; landscape designer Katie Duncan set the scene in the backyard.





room. In the foyer, a vintage Moroccan side chair mingles deftly with an Arts and Crafts-era Thebes stool. In the living room, a midcentury woven lounge chair by the Maine artist John Risley winks at a plush green sofa custom-made to match the bright walls and an antique side table.

In the yard beyond, Gilbert and Hammer enlisted landscape designer Katie Duncan to plant a towering row of fast-growing Savannah holly to create privacy, and the Charleston artist Ann Ladson to design and install container pots. Duncan also selected a tricolor ginger plant specifically to reflect the color of the living room, an interplay of indoors and out.

While installing a generator in a corner of the property, contractors unearthed what is believed to be a late eighteenth to early nineteenth-century footing for a garden bench or fountain, molded with a blend of horsehair, clay, straw, lime, shell, and stone. Hammer took the piece to a local metal fabricator to have it artfully mounted. It now stands prominently opposite the couple's front door, a centuries-old calling card.

The home balances many voices: past and present, historic and modern, vivid color and worn brick, a dynamic dissonance that sings as a whole. One of the Board of Architectural Review members perhaps said it best at the public hearing on the addition back in 2015, when he argued that architectural expression need not stop at any particular date, even in historic districts, if done thoughtfully: "An orchestra is made up of a lot of instruments that are so different from one another, and yet they still can react in harmony. It's not all violins." @



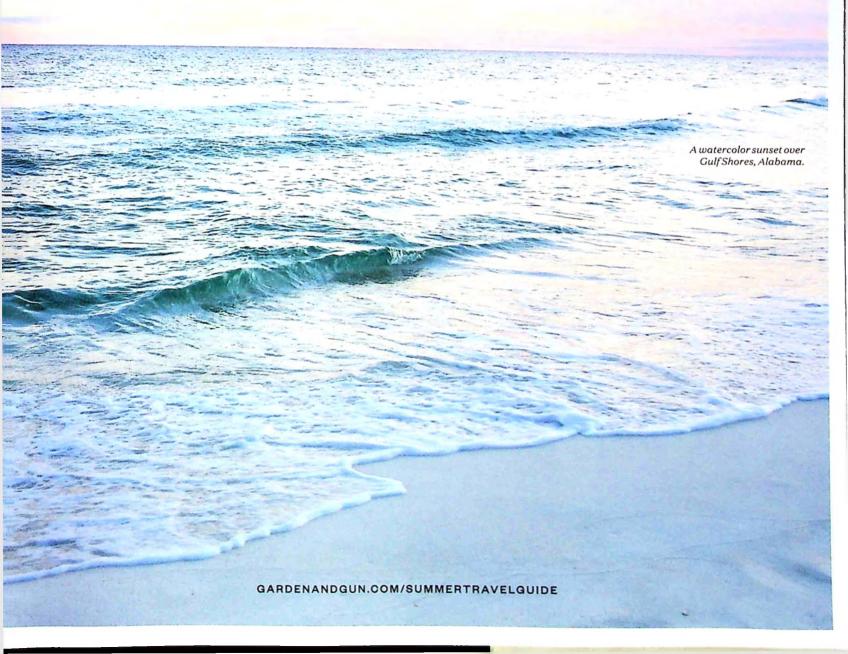
Landscape designer Katie Duncan selected a tricolor ginger plant to reflect the color of the living room, an interplay ofindoors and out



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Mississippi

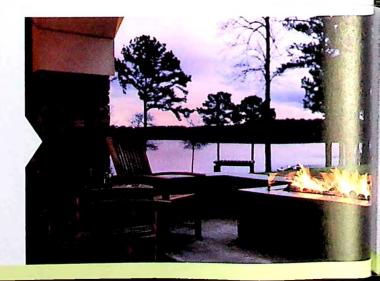
With a rich history and a stunning landscape, Mississippi offers the best of the South. Be it hiking the Appalachian foothills or canoeing the mighty Mississippi River, outdoor lovers will delight in the state's wild spaces. Meanwhile, a collection of celebrated museums capture legends from the civil rights era to the Grammy stage, and local restaurants serve up delicacies such as fresh-caught catfish and Delta hot tamales.

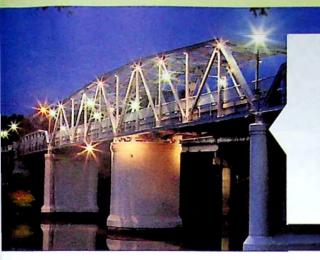
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Lake Oconee, Georgia

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Columbus, Mississippi

Overlooking the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, Columbus, Mississippi, offers beauty and excitement in abundance. A quintessentially Southern destination, the city brims with historical heritage, from the iconic Tennessee Williams House Museum to three National Register of Historic Places districts. Columbus Lake provides a 9,000-acre backdrop for boating, fishing, and water sports, while elevated fare and classic comfort food are served in the slew of beloved restaurants on shore.

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Old 96 District, South Carolina

Encompassing five small counties, South Carolina's Old 96 District is a true haven for outdoor adventure. The area includes three lakes, six state parks, and more than 250 miles of hiking and biking trails, as well as two Revolutionary War battlegrounds and the birthplace of civil rights leader Benjamin E. Mays. Each town is also a treasure trove of local art, culture, and cuisine, promising a truly inspired getaway.

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Lago Mar Beach Resort & Club, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Nestled among ten lush acres on the Atlantic Ocean lies Lago Mar Beach Resort & Club. Lago Mar offers one-of-a-kind comfort, genuine hospitality, and a spacious tropical retreat. Consistently named among the world's finest hotels, the resort teems with luxury at every turn.

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Fredericksburg, Texas

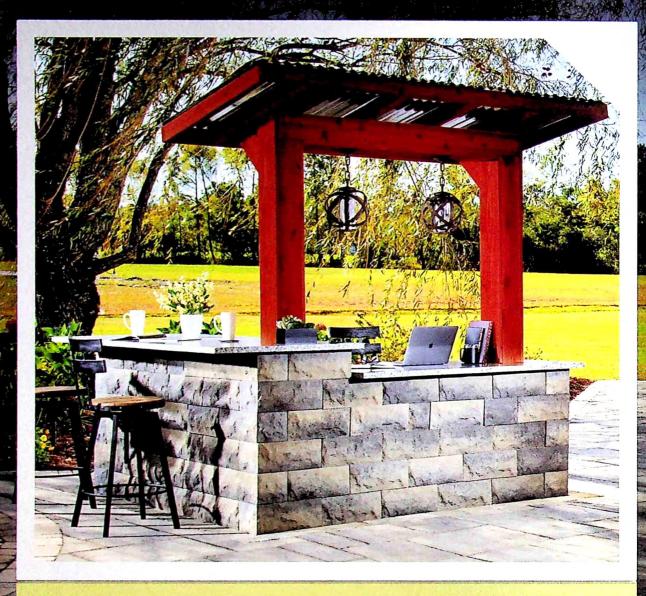
Tucked away in the Texas Hill Country, Fredericksburg is a small Southern town with a unique European feel. Here, family-owned vineyards offer personalized tours and tasting experiences, local boutiques dot the tree-lined streets, and incredibly fresh produce appears on restaurant menus. Whether it's traditional Texas barbecue or a bit of museum hopping you seek, there's no better place to get away from it all—especially for a midweek escape.

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BY BRANDON CHONKO

A Farmer's Shadow

ANAGING AND ABANDONED COUNTRY DOG FINDS HIS PACK ON A SOUTH GEORGIA FARM

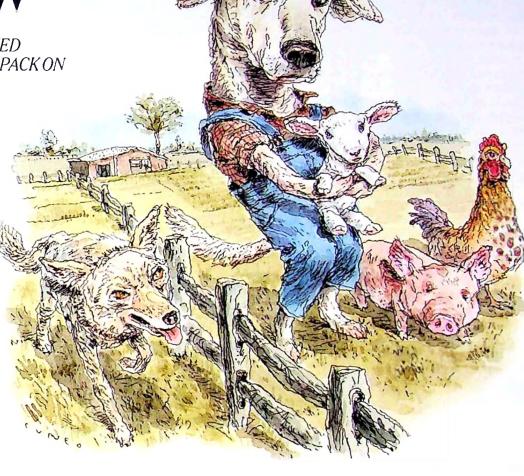


All beginnings set us up for endings. As a farmer, I know that well. A farm is a living, breathing thing, and the changes I see almost daily remind me that time is fleeting, and nature is cyclical. We plant seeds and harvest crops. The sunny days of today will give way to clouds and rain, but the sun will come back, and the cycle will repeat itself.

Our South Georgia farm sits off a loose sand road in rough but beautiful country-just thirty miles due east of the Okefenokee Swamp and home to gators, snakes, and a king's ransom of insects. My wife and I have three kids, two boys and a girl. We farm pigs that we raise on pasture, meat chickens, and eggs, with a smattering of vegetables and citrus. It's a fairly bucolic life. A good life. The kind Hie in bed at night and feel thankful for.

There is a special glue that holds us all together, more than the dirt and the chores. Our dogs. The luckiest dogs on earth. Loved beyond measure. They help me work. They give my daughter "pony" rides. They help my boys hunt squirrel and rabbit. The farm just wouldn't be the same without them.

The property was once part of a plantation, but by the time we came along in 2014, it had changed hands many times and surrendered to a tangled mess of pine, oak, grapevine, and briar that took



months to clear out. It is in what locals refer to as "the north end" of Camden County. Last county on the Georgia coast before you get to Florida. The terrain is as flat as a lake on a windless day, interrupted only by deep drainage ditches along the dirt roads, which wash out after heavy rains. In our pastures, our pigs routinely root up onehundred-year-old clay turpentine cups, properly called Herty cups. They appear peeking out of the black sand, relics from the days when the longleaf pine ecosystem ruled this area. I imagine men in overalls and brogans wandering these remote woods, leading a mule and wagon and collecting the sticky pine resin from tree after tree, day after day. At night I swear I feel their ghosts breathing down my neck. It's the kind of place that either draws you in or pushes you away, no middle ground. Hove it. So do the dogs.

I spend a lot of time working alone, with only the dogs for company, and over time we've learned to understand one another as members of the same pack. We've come to an unspoken agreement. I'll protect you and you'll protect me, and as long as we're able to live, we'll do it to the utmost. You'll live in a dog paradise, with the run of your thirty acres. You won't know the tether of a leash. In the winter you'll be free to sleep where you find warmth, and in the summer you can cool down in the creek. The rest of the world will remain outside our gates. This is our kingdom.

I share that bond with two livestock guard dogs, Mags and Paws, both majestic Great Pyrenees; Chase, a part-Pyrenees mutt with a taste for wild rabbit; and Otis, a black pit-Lab mix I found in the woods on a cold winter day, starved and chewing on a pine cone. Then there was Chance—Old Chancey Boy, the old Sarge. The toughest old dog I've ever seen. He joined the pack some years ago, just after we'd lost two

dogs on the same night to unrelated causes. The first died of old age on the porch, and the other at the vet's office after getting into coyote bait some jackass had put out down the road. Around that time, someone showed up at the vet with two dogs, identical brothers. They were abandoned, hungry, and well past their prime. Both were heartworm positive. One died at the vet's office. The other was Chance.

The vet called to ask if I'd take him. For some reason, if you own a farm, people think you'll take an endless parade of canines. Of course, lobliged.

No one knew his exact age, but I'd guess he was eight or nine, maybe older. He looked like a full-blooded yellow Lab. His eyes had begun to gray around the edges, and age had

taken the bounce from his step, but he got along pretty well, like an old dependable pickup truck that won't win a drag race but won't leave you stranded on the side of the road, either.

From the moment he arrived, Chance was in his element. I cured his heartworm with sheep wormer and got him back in match shape. Like a farmer's foot slipping with ease into a well-worn work boot, he seamlessly found his place in the pack. On a farm, you have different kinds of dogs,

all fine animals in their own ways: guard dogs, working dogs, and lying-around dogs. Chance was mostly the lying-around type. He loved sleep, food, and wallowing in the dirt trying to scratch that impossible-to-reach spot on his back. Lurking just underneath his seemingly carefree demeanor, though, was a palpable wisdom.

Chance took to ambling behind me as I fed the animals. Content in his own skin and seeking no approval from me, he wasn't the crowding type and didn't have a neurotic bone in his grizzled body. But he was always in my vicinity, poking and sniffing around the dirt. He was good to alert me to snakes in the tall grass and seemed to enjoy protecting those around him. With the chickens he was gentle. Around the more rambunctious hogs he was stern. I rarely saw him growl, but I never saw another animal cross him. Chance reminded me of a

soft-spoken grandfather who had weathered life's storms long enough to see old age, the kind of man who doesn't have to yell and scream to get his point across. His very being seemed to be enough to give pause to anything looking to exploit any perceived old-dog weakness.

As he got older, I worried he wouldn't make it through the winter. When spring came along, I worried he wouldn't survive the heat of summer. This dance went on for years. Me doubting him and him paying my uncertainty absolutely no attention. He was ageless, infinite, giving the middle finger to time. In all the years I knew him, he never changed much. When I'd bring him up to friends, they'd say, "Shit, that dog is still alive?" Betyour

ass still alive. Still following me around as I work. Still eating his weight in table scraps.

Farm dogs aren't like their suburban cousins. They don't want to come inside. They're more primal, wilder. I've seen a farm dog kill a coyote and care for a newborn lamb with equal tenacity. Many don't like to ride in cars.

Once I took Chance on a drive up to the feed mill in my truck. Hell, I thought, he's an old dog, and old dogs love to ride around. Not Chance. To say he was uncomfortable

isn't doing it justice. He was anxious and whiny, his tough exterior melting in the unfamiliarity of the truck. After he got back to the farm that day, he never rode in a vehicle again. He'd seen enough to know he didn't need to see any more. With his own land to roam and a large barn to sleep in and all the animals to look after, he had all he wanted.

As a livestock farmer, I am reminded of death fairly regularly. Often my customers will ask me if I get sad taking a load of hogs to the abattoir or processing chickens. The truth is, no, I don't. I am grateful and appreciative, but not sad. Daily I'm surrounded by magnitudes of life. I see babies born and flowers bloom, and at night the frogs can be so loud they keep me up. I also see death, and not only is it a part of life, it provides life. To be a livestock animal on my farm means you get a lot of great days and one bad one. We should all be so lucky. But when you work with dogs, you get into a rhythm, even with the lying-around types. It's a beautiful thing. And when you lose a dog, that rhythm changes in a way that is profoundly heartbreaking.

On the day Chance died, he didn't look any older than the day I got him, though he must have been fourteen or fifteen. Part of our pack's agreement, I'd like to think, is that when it's time to go, we go quickly. We don't question it or run from it. When the quality of this great life slips into the ether, we follow.

I'll always remember his last day on earth, one of those sunny late-winter days when the air teases you with spring. The pines thick with pollen. Frogs croaking in the swamp. The smells and sounds of the place that had come to inhabit his soul surrounded him. I laid him on the tailgate of the truck and cried, and my fist dented the steering wheel a few times. Oh how the death of a dog makes me angry. I carried him to that old, crooked pine where we lay our fallen dogs to rest. Even though I only knew him as an old dog, I picture him now as a puppy, running in a field, the wind at his back and his tongue hanging out, reunited with his brother and free from the heavy weight of age. Someday the rest of the pack will be running with him. Someday it'll be my turn. And when it is, I couldn't ask for a better sentinel to greet me as he wakes up from a nap and looks at me with those steady eyes, surely asking, "Did you bring any table scraps?" To Chance. Toughest old dog around. Long may he run.



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BY VIVIAN HOWARD

Mind Trip

THE PRESSURES OF THE LAST YEAR FIND RELEASE IN A DREAM DAY AT THE BEACH



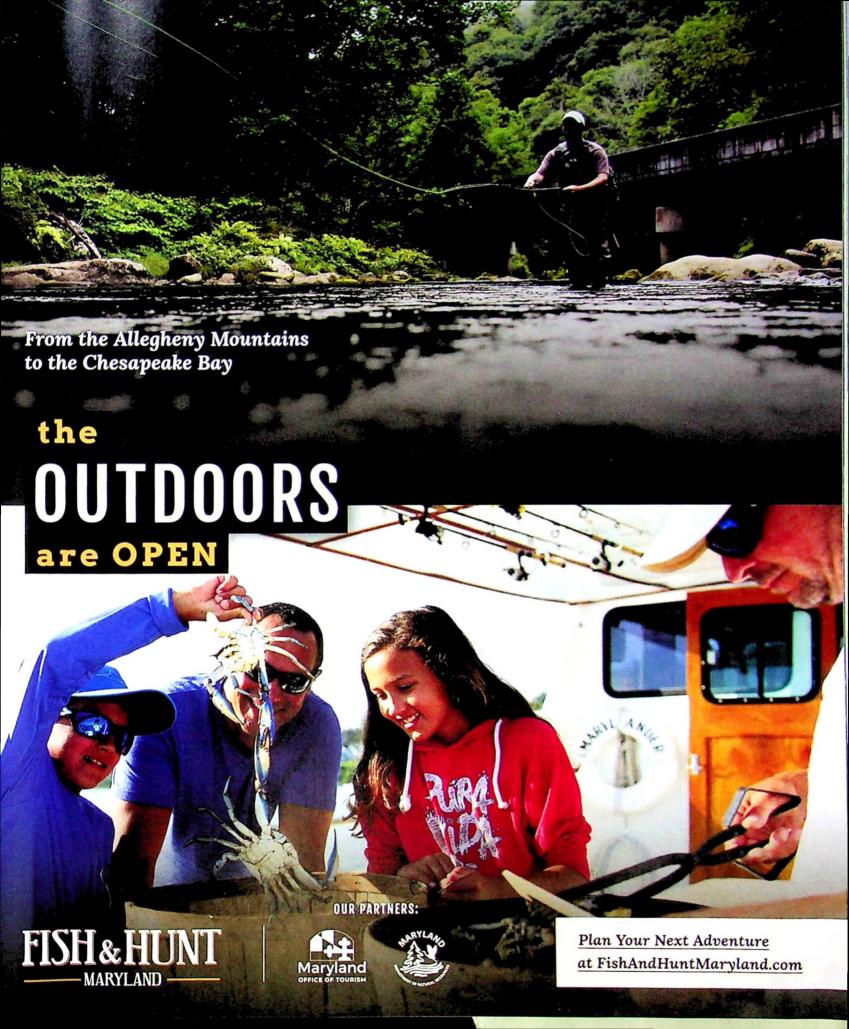


hen the pandemic pointed out that my flagship restaurant, Chef & the Farmer, in small-town Kinston, North Carolina, was only viable if people traveled, I imagined a life running a feed and seed store focusing on houseplants instead. When a member of my biological family exposed my work family to COVID-19 days before Christmas, I conjured all my favorite memories of Christmases

past and projected them right there onto the present. And when the walls of our collective confinement nagged like a mosquito at my ear, I walked the well-worn mental path to my perfect day at the beach. Daydreaming has long been my particular brand of coping

and hoping. So in the long, low moments of the pandemic, when I just knew I'd never *really* travel again; when I virtually slapped myself for not trying more versions of the pink flash-fried shrimp that time in Nerano, Italy; when I was certain all my friendships outside my pod had withered, I fantasized about a sublime day in the sun and sand.

Igrew up a little more than an hour from North Carolina's Crystal Coast. Some people claimed you could smell the salt air of Emerald Isle, Atlantic Beach, and Pine Knoll Shores from my family's farm in Deep Run, but because summer was to bacco season and my parents met all forms of leisure with disapproval, we spent our sun-drenched days in a field or a barn and our tans started at the same of the



elbow. In fact, the first time I set foot on a beach of any kind, I was nine years old and visiting Ocracoke with a friend's family in January. It was cold and foggy, desolate and honestly kind of spooky-not the day at the shore I'd envisioned.

Now in my daydreams I wake up on Bald Head Island in June: Bald Head because an island that doesn't allow cars feels far away, but not so far I have to fly and be reminded of too many trips cross-country hauling food to this festival or that fundraiser; June because it's the beginning of summer, the bundle of weeks when the season holds the promise of many more days just like this one. The windows are open so I can hear the waves crashing. I can see them, too. My second-floor room looks out onto where the Cape Fear River meets the Atlantic. Cargo ships as tall as skyscrapers and tugboats tiny and blue move through the channel and remind me that some people are working, yet lam not.

Downstairs I find my twin tweens, usually allergic to selfstarting of any kind, smearing sunscreen over every inch of their exposed skin. I suggest we ride bikes to breakfast because I suggest we ride bikes everywhere and they always say no. Now they leap for their helmets without protest. We are the early birds and the traffic-free road our worm as we glide through the speckled light of the maritime forest.

I decided in my early twenties that breakfast would be the best meal to eat out while at the beach. My sisters, vacation amateurs like me, had married people by then who had been going on normal getaways their whole lives. My dad

still wouldn't dream of spending a night away from the farm, so we began renting a house on Emerald Isle for a week every summer—he could drive down for supper and drive back to Deep Run to sleep. But with no understanding of how to properly engage with the shore, we woke up day after day, brewed pots of coffee, and talked about what we should do when we finally got motivated. In my mind, breakfast at a restaurant would get us out, get us started, and perhaps give us ideas for how bona fide beach people behaved.

Alas, the breakfast-out beach ritual never took. We still piddle inside half the day. But in my ideal scenario, my kids and I park our bikes just outside Yana's in Swansboro. (Yes, we jumped from Bald Head to Swansboro. It's my daydream and I'll jump if I want to.) To my kids' delight, there is no line. Both my children, who hate to make good choices in front of me, order a side of fruit with their peach fritters, and I settle into the thing I always want to order at diners but never do: two eggs over easy, white toast, bacon, and hash browns. And it's fine that it's nothing fancy, because I'm not there for restaurant research, I'm there to escape. Since March 2020, I've permanently closed the Boiler Room, the Cheers of my town. I've overhauled Chef & the Farmer. I've opened a biscuit and handpie shop in Charleston, South Carolina; launched a PBS series I've cared about like a baby, three years in the making; and fin-

ished writing, shooting for, and promoting my second cookbook. Phew. Change my order to peach fritters with a side of cheeseburger. Then, over short glasses of OJ and multiple cups of weak coffee, we chat about the day ahead and how grateful we are to be here at the beach sans the iPads and Xboxes my born-again angels elected to leave back home.

From there, limagine I'm an organized domestic planner. As a restaurateur and general people pleaser, I know how to put on a special experience. Yet in my family life, I'm lucky if I muster a B-plus at anything besides skin care. Here, though, I think ahead, make lists, shop in advance. I'm able to connect the dots to next-

level activities because I laid the dots beforehand. Picnics, for instance: There's hardly an event I'd rather host. But the packing, the planning, the schleppingall of that is why I only go on picnics in my head. Not today. Today we stop at Roberts Grocery in Wrightsville Beach for a pint of chicken salad. We swing by the Friendly Market in Morehead City to grab pimento cheese and a tomato pie. And back at the beach house, as everybody suits up, I cut cold Bogue Sound watermelon into perfect cubes. I finally break out the vintage

tiffin box I bought but have never used, and stack the chicken I fried last night below watermelon with flaky salt. Above that sits the adult watermelon soaked with tequila and lime, then the chicken salad and pimento cheese sandwiches on white bread. The tomato pie fits perfectly on top.

Daydreams are no place for dragging chairs, games, umbrellas, vintage tiffin boxes, and coolers down to the beach. As many times as I've tried, I can't reimagine that act as anything other than hot and laborious. Instead, we load up our four-wheel drive and find a spot right on the shore of Ocracoke, only a few yards from the patch of sand we'll call ours. It's low tide, when shallow puddles make safe cool places for kids to play and adults to lie. I grab my book, a juicy romance. Just as I reach the best part, my children run over. I grimace behind my sunglasses. Usually, it takes at least fifteen minutes before they ask to be entertained. But on this day, for the first time ever, my codependent twins have made some friends right out there in the wild. They don't need me after all.

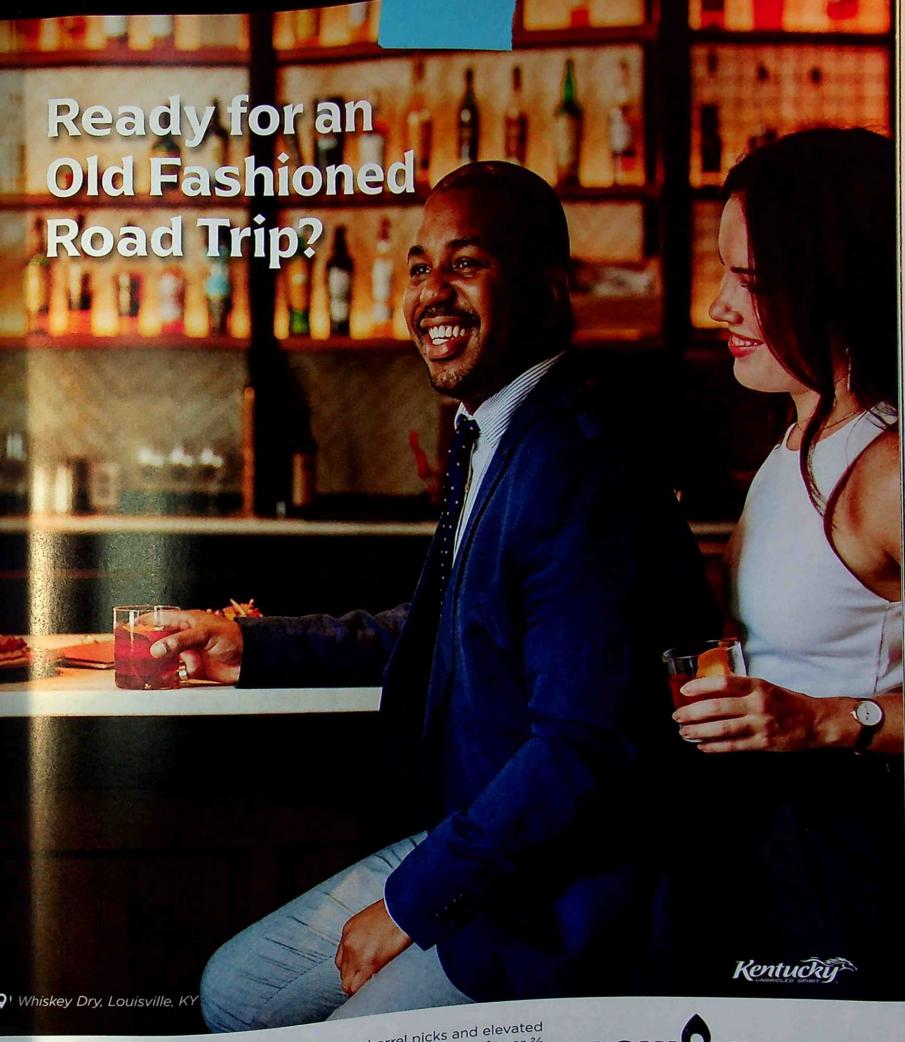
I read. I swim. I catnap. We eat fried chicken sandwiches, slurp booze-soaked fruit, and people-watch until the light shifts and the breeze gives an edge to the heat of my suntan.

I'm the kind of tired some might mistake for post-exercise exertion, but those of us well versed in sun and sand recognize as joy-fatigue. I shower, moisturize with something faintly coconut, and put on a cute dress because a good suntan deserves it. I serve simple snacks-cheese and crackers, boiled shrimp, crab dip and chips. I cook something outside. I know it should be fish because I'm Vivian Howard and no one can fathom I cook anything but fish at the beach, but instead I grill steak, bake potatoes, boil sweet corn, and slice tomatoes. Someone else is handling the music, so I'm not worried if people are enjoying the nineties hip-hop/Taylor Swift mishmash that is my default. There's a lot of laughing, fueled by a fair amount of slightly effervescent white wine. I'm in a rocking chair with a plate of steak on my lap and a glass of that wine in my hand. As the sun sets on my daydream, casting the last of its pink light across my kids' silhouettes, I soak it up, squeezing every last drop of its magic into a little reservoir that shifts my attitude and makes the mundanity of most days feel like a day at the beach. G



ASA RESTAURANT OWNER, I **KNOW HOW** TO PUT ON A SPECIAL EXPERIENCE. **YET IN MY** FAMILY LIFE, I'M LUCKY IF I MUSTER A B-PLUS AT **ANYTHING BESIDES SKIN** CARE





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AS SUMMER BECKONS, SIX WRITERS CHASE the OPEN HIGHWAY, DROPPING PINS along the WAY at a MISSISSIPPI BARBECUE JOINT, BACKLIT BLUE RIDGE VISTAS, and a CERVEZA SOAKED BORDER TOWN that PRACTICALLY WROTE ITSELF into the ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP SONG

Illustrations by DERIK HOBBS



Lyrical Rewind

GRINGO HONEYMOON

HOW an OFF-ROAD ADVENTURE INSPIRED the CLASSIC TEXAS SONG

By ROBERT EARL KEEN

RALPH WALDO EMERSON NEVER MET THE SLIM DUCK. HE

never met Gray Dude or Ginger. And he certainly never crossed the great American West in a '67 Barracuda convertible. But had RWE experienced anything akin to making a road trip with a bewitching heartthrob like the Slim Duck, he might have tempered his opinion

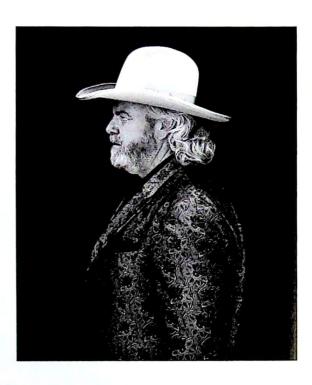
about traveling being a "fool's paradise."

If traveling is a fool's paradise, then hand me those sunglasses and pass the beer. I've been a fool for traveling since the last quarter of the twentieth century began, and I made my virgin road trip to Los Angeles with the Slim Duck, her black Lab, Ginger, and her surly African gray parrot, Gray Dude. This was my first adventure born of reckless abandon. The Duck, a ravishing and fearless freedom fighter, threw her compass to the wind and put her barefoot fun locator to the accelerator. Along the way, we experienced everything from breakdowns to break-ins; from sleeping in the car to cantina bar fights to camping under the desert night sky with a zillion stars. Our L.A.-or-bust interstate expedition gave birth to a lifetime of wanderlust. Moreover, our junket gave me my first glimpse of the vast Far West Texas land known as the Trans-Pecos.

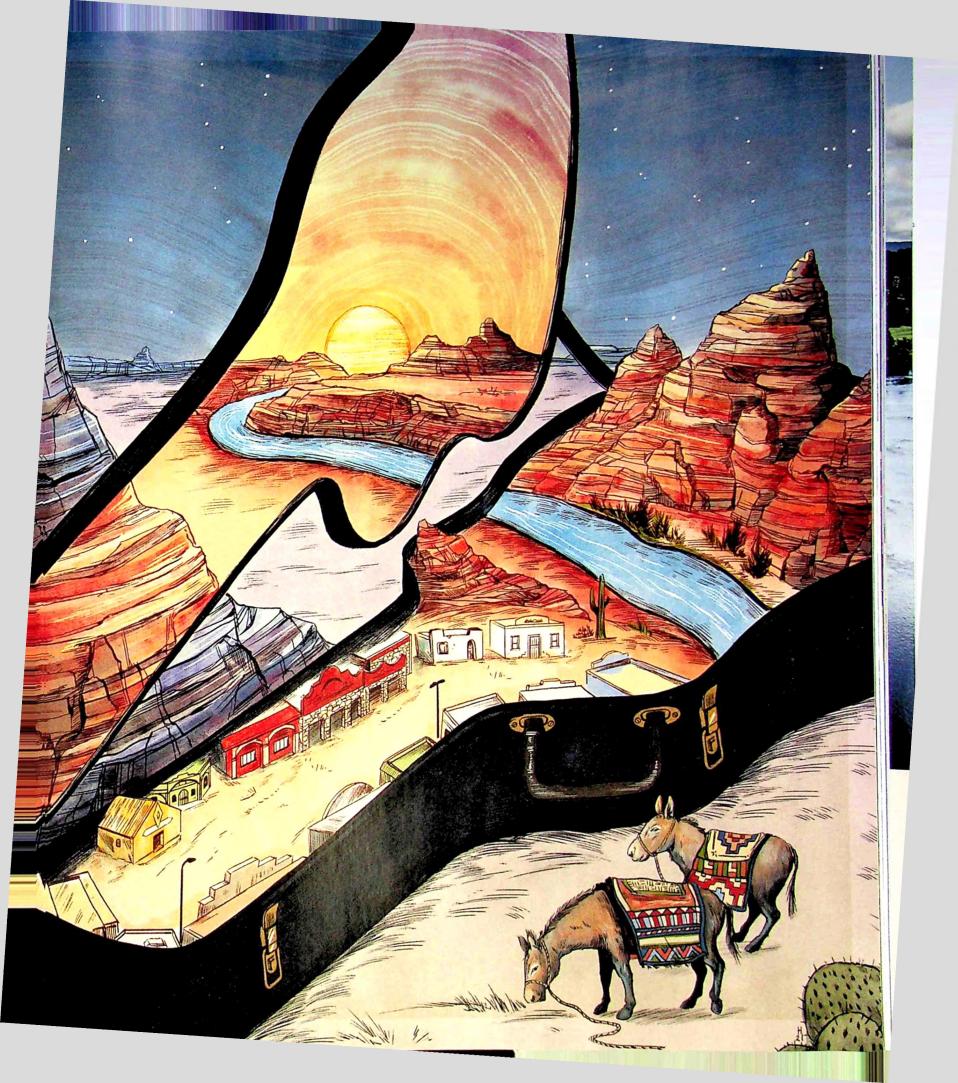
A dozen years, a bountiful marriage, and enough gigs to pay the bills later, I was perched on the staircase landing above the San Antonio River, idly watching a party boat full of tourists float the day away. It was a surprisingly cool afternoon for summer in South Texas, and the River Walk was bustling with smiling faces and laughter. I was lost in thought when I felt a tap on my shoulder. Iturned to see a small man who smiled and addressed me by name. I had no idea who he was. I don't recall the exact interaction, but we found a rhythm to our conversation. I casually told him how my wife, Kathleen, and I were headed to Chisos Mountains Lodge in Big

Bend National Park. His face lit up like the neon sign on San Antonio's legendary Mi Tierrarestaurant. John, my new stranger friend, grabbed my hand and without any preview to his sales pitch, whispered one word, "Boquillas." He went one step further: "Ask anyone in Big Bend how to get there. If you go, you'll remember it for the rest of your life!" I was somewhat stunned and starting to get that "where is the exit?" feeling in my gut. I slowly slid my hand from his clammy grasp and walked up the steps. When I reached the top, he hollered, "Hey, you're gonna write a song about it!"

Well, hell. What Gordon Lightfoot song did this guy crawl out of? How did he know me and what was



Road warrior and singer-songwriter Robert Earl Keen. photographed in Austin, Texas,





BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK BOOUILLAS, MEXICO



Opposite, from top: A donkey rests after delivering visitors to the town of Boquillas, Mexico: the Rio Grande and Big Bend National Park

the name of that town that sounded like a breakfast taco?

On our way to the Trans-Pecos and Big Bend, I gave Kathleen an abbreviated version of my afternoon rendezvous with John Stranger and suggested it might be worth investigating. Kathleen, who is always game and the most we-should-have-done-it-yesterday person I know, agreed. We jettisoned our hiking plans and set out for our new destination the following morning. After several false starts, a few wrong turns, and one photo shoot with a dead rattlesnake, we found the lost landing of Boquillas. That is to say, the sandy knoll that drops off into the Rio Grande.

The town of Boquillas, on the Mexican side of the river, is a border town like no other. It was a village where time seemed to stop in the decades somewhere between the Roaring Twenties and World War II. Our first indication of any chronological aberration was the uninspiring means of river transport. Resting on the sandy banks of the Boquillas landing was a small tarred and faded jon boat that had not seen an ounce of love since Andy and Opie left Mayberry. Sitting motionless and waiting patiently on a hard, grainy cross plank was our captain, Pablo. Kathleen and I stumbled into the boat, and after an embarrassingly butchered attempt at a Mexican greeting, I handed Captain Pablo two U.S. dollars and off we went. Almost simultaneously we left the country where time never ceases and entered a land where time never began.

Historically, Boquillas served as a mining town and a water stop for Mexican ranchers. Caballeros and outlaws alike enjoyed a bar, a livery stable, and a dry goods store. It looked like a Sam Peckinpah Western town—dusty, sparse, broken, and remote. As we floated, I was thinking about the movie The Wild Bunch and at the same time trying to gauge Kathleen's reaction to our adventure when a metamorphosis began to permeate our collective consciousness. The combination of the time-travel crossing and the smell of fresh water on the desert air, coupled with the sepia-toned, dreamlike quality of our surroundings, was intoxicating. I turned and looked at my wife. She was smiling like a child in a room full of fluttering monarch butterflies. Hereyes shone with the magic of the moment. It made me laugh. Still does.

We made landfall and kissed the sunbaked sand (or did I snag the toe of my boot on the bow cleat and execute a hapless face-plant?). Twenty yards from the water's edge stood a large tree. It was old and gnarly and looked like a spot where banditos once swung from the short end of a rope. At the base of the hanging tree sat an old man surrounded by a half dozen donkeys. I was still reeling from my linguistic flub with Captain Pablo, so I stuck with default communication skills. I held up two fingers and pointed at the donkeys, then threw my hands up above my shoulders. The old man flashed two open palms at me. I paid him ten bucks American, and he handed over two sturdy donkeys that made the half-mile trip into the heart of the town of Boquillas in a bit under an hour.

Our first commercial foray in Boquillas was a smeared-glass and wind-ravaged gift shop. It reminded me of all the crap that I loved and longed for when my parents took us to Piedras Negras or Nuevo Laredo on family vacation. How many onyx chess sets is too many? If one has a black-and-white bullwhip and a brown-andwhite one, is it considered extravagant if one buys a red-and-white bullwhip? ("¡No te préoccupes, mijo! ¿Quieres este?" No problem.) The switchblades were on back order, however, so we moved next door to the cabana, where we met the man who was known as the unofficial mayor (or was it sheriff?) of Boquillas, Danny Hickle. He downloaded a taco bite of delirious color into our international odyssey. My experience has taught me that all worthwhile adventures include a human caretaker, and when it comes to road trip road managers, they don't get better than the fugitive Danny Hickle.

From the outset, Danny came on a little strong for my taste, but he and Kathleen were on their way to becoming famous before I found the baño. By the time I returned, they were doing shots and making pinkie promises, with plans to turn Danny's hovel into a political meetinghouse. I paid up, grabbed my beer, and caught up with the newly forged demonic duo in time to enter Danny's dugout bunker—a postapocalyptic edifice of rock, asphalt, and chicken wire. Mezcal was passed around. Toasts were given. So many plans and promises were made that it would take five lifetimes to honor them. Finally, the excitement started to wane, and I was missing my donkey. We decided to bid Danny a fond "vaya con dios." It was almost a clean exit.

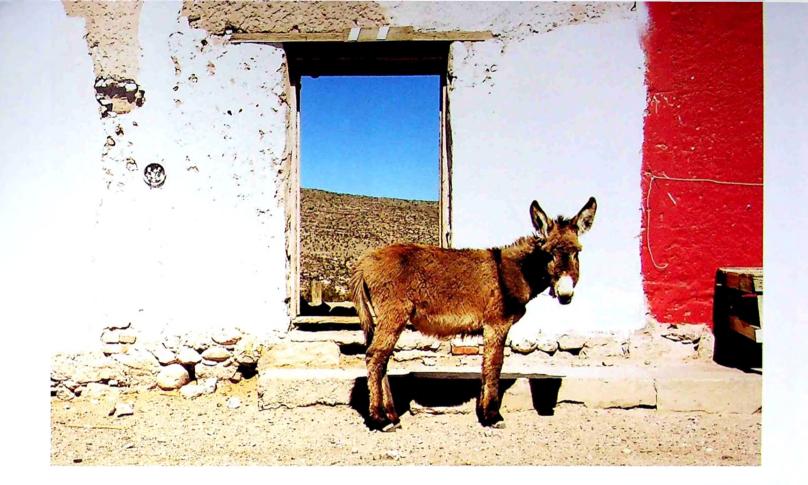
Our Boquillas road trip ended with an epic finale. We were still in earshot of Danny's house when he hollered, "One for the road?" And soon we were standing in what most considered to be the best bar in this part of Mexico. Icicle shelving lined the bar, sending cool slivers of dancing colored light throughout the room. A caballero brought his guitar and sang strange and beautiful songs. More beer. More mezcal. More pinkie promises and plans of reunion. There were tears but no regrets—except for the mandatory donkey curfew.

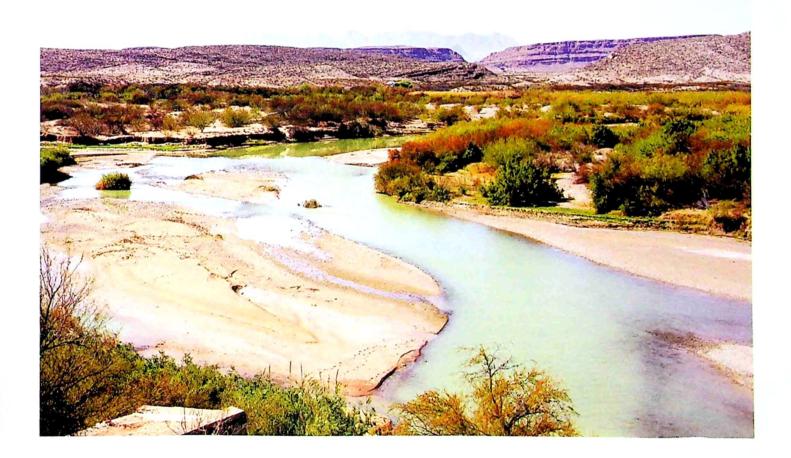
On the boat ride back to the U.S. side of the Rio Grande, Kathleen and I sat wrapped in a blanket looking up at the stars. In a somewhat rhetorical fashion, I asked her, "How did we get here, KK?" She reminded meabout the guy I met on the River Walk, John Stranger. I thought about him for a minute and then told Kathleen the bit I hadn't mentioned. The part of the story where John Stranger told me if we went to Boquillas, I'd write a song about it. Kathleen looked at me and said, "He's right. You will."

A CABALLERO BROUGHT HIS GUITAR AND SANG STRANGE AND BEAUTIFUL SONGS. MORE BEER. MORE MEZCAL









Return Trip

RIDING SHOTGUN

JOURNEYS into the HEART of MISSISSIPPI

By JESSICA B. HARRIS

am NOT a DRIVER. AS ONE WHO HAS SPENT HER entire adult life in New York City, I have never needed to know how to operate several tons of metal on an asphalt track. Now, however, after more than a year of sequester and confinement, I find myself wishing that long, long ago I had mastered the rules of the road. I muse back on good times spent riding shotgun or simply rolling along in the back seat without a worry about navigation or speed limits, with my eyes free to view the countryside and the roadside attractions.

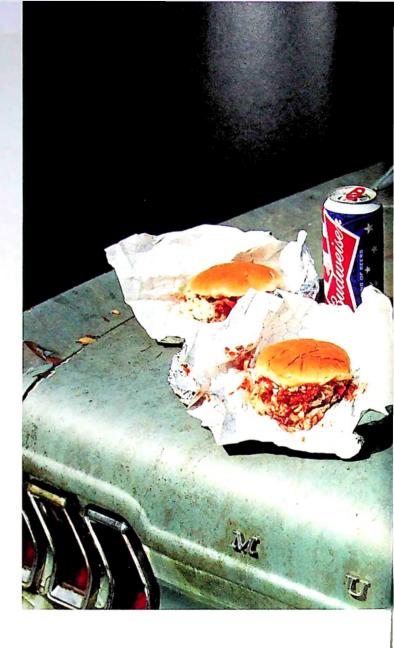
As my mind goes over the multiple road trips I have taken, one keeps pushing itself to the top of the list. That trip runs from the Memphis airport to Oxford, Mississippi, and then rambles farther into the state to Greenville. I was an annual regular on those Mississippi roads for ten years in the 1990s and then again for another five in the late 2010s.

My initial ride on the Oxford section of the journey was my first trip into the reaches of the Deep South. For me, a Northern-born Black person who had no Southern relatives, Mississippi was a place of memory and fear from flickering television sets of my youth; it was the fabled South, the South of racial memory and unspeakable history. Simply the word *Mississippi* was daunting. What would the road hold? What was in store for me? "Oxford Town" sung by Bob Dylan was on the playlist that accompanied me, and when I crossed the line from Tennessee into the Magnolia State, I pumped up the volume on "Mississippi Goddam" by Nina Simone, which had been one of the anthems of my younger days.

On my first trip, I was riding shotgun with my sister-friend, Daphne Derven, who had flown in from California. We met at the Memphis airport with its brown-tiled concourses perfumed with

the aroma of barbecue, went through the rental formalities, and then headed out toward Oxford, the site of the conference that would result in the formation of the Southern Foodways Alliance. We attacked the road at speeds that were illegal in my neck of the woods. Just after we'd exited the airport's urban sprawl, the entrance signs for Graceland loomed up. We zoomed past. I prefer Big Mama Thornton, cannot imagine peanut butter and bananas, and





am not really fond of shag carpets and velour excess. My friend agreed.

Soon, a large sign welcomed us to Mississippi, and the clinging vines that I would learn were kudzu began to cover the trees. The haunting and gothic history of Mississippi was palpable in the landscape, and I felt its atavistic ringing in my blood. I thought of Bobbie Gentry's Tallahatchie Bridge and those strange-fruit-bearing trees of Billie Holiday.

On that initial trip, the cotton was high and as yet unharvested. When I saw the first white fields blooming in the autumn sun looking like so many snow-covered fields, it was as though I had returned to a place seared in my memory. We screeched to a halt and I jumped out, headed over a gully and into some poor man's cotton field where I availed myself of several branches, risking arrest and initiating what would become a decade-long ritual of the annual thieving of the cotton. I scampered back up bearing an armload of white bolls peeking out from leathery brown pods, marveling at their prickly tenacity and the pristine white of the



OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI

cotton, a small personal reparation.

The road was fast and straight, and the trip lasted a scant hour and a half. As we neared the turnoff for Oxford, we came to a halt at Betty Davis Bar-B-Que, a roadside joint straight out of central casting complete with hound dogs in the yard, picnic tables inside, racks of pork rinds and jerky, and a counterfull of large jars of Kool-Aid pickles and pickled pigs' lips. The barbecue was sublime: sweet and tangy with a slight char. And it was only fifteen minutes from Oxford. Replete with 'cue and beer, we found our way into town. A false turn meant that we missed the entrance to the University of Mississippi campus and ended up at the town square. Ever vigilant for shopping opportunities, I spotted an antique store called Material Culture. An hour later we emerged, I with a boxed set of bone-handled silverware, a nineteenth-century overshot blanket, and friends who have endured for more than twenty-five years. The square also boasted a world-class bookstore, and as I am one who owns upwards of six thousand books, that was worth the trip in itself. Mississippi was not at all as I had imagined it; it was confusing, problematic, and powerful.

From top: Kudzu on the drive to Greenwood: Square Books in downtown Oxford. Opposite, from top: Pulled pork sandwiches with cole slaw at Betty Davis Bar-B-Que; a sculpture of guitars at the intersection of Highways 61 and 49 in Clarksdale marks the supposed spot where Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil.





With the passing years, as in the 1967 film Two for the Road, I recalled earlier journeys as I sped down the stretch of asphalt with different drivers and cohorts of changing and developing friends. It was always the same road, and yet it was always different. Sometimes it felt as if I passed incarnations of my younger self. A stop at Cozy Corner barbecue restaurant in Memphis stood in for Betty Davis some years. The barbecued Cornish game hen was well worth a stop, not that far from the Memphis airport. I rarely entered Oxford without a bag dripping grease from some barbecue joint and always had an armful of that purloined cotton.

In later years, after I stopped attending the SFA annual symposium, my Mississippi journeys continued to morph. I no longer headed to Oxford but often bypassed it to take other turns and roadways all the way down to Greenville, where for about five years I regularly attended the Delta Hot Tamale Festival held there the third weekend in October. For many of these trips, my driver and companion of the road was Oxford legend Ron Shapiro, a.k.a. Ronzo. With him, I discovered other ways out of Memphis, other places to eat, and other roads because the trip to Greenville took me into the Delta and to another storied part of the state.

The friends on the Oxford jaunts were culinary, but the Delta Hot Tamale Festival, curated by the late Julia Reed, was a bonanza of writers and artists. I got to share rides with legends like Calvin "Bud" Trillin and the artists William Dunlap, John Alexander, and Ashley Pridmore. One year, we took a page from another Dylan song and revisited Highway 61. As we journeyed along, we took a detour to Greenwood, where we stumbled on a blues festival and the town's artistic vibe made shopping even more fun. Heft Greenwood with an antique cotton-picking basket to remind me of the not-so-distant past and a Mose T painting of a watermelon. We stopped at the crossroads of Highways 61 and 49 in Clarksdale near the spot where bluesman Robert Johnson allegedly made his deal with the devil. On other trips we visited spots that sang with the poetry of place: Itta Bena; Indianola and the B. B. King Museum; Leland, the birthplace of Kermit the Frog; Sunflower County, home of Fannie Lou Flamer; and Alligator.

Road trips in Mississippi always left me seriously conscious of my personal cultural conundrum and constantly aware that the bright adventure-filled names all too often covered places where life's promise for folks like me was the grease smear of roadkill on a country highway. Yet through it all Mississippi fascinated and still fascinates me, and I can't wait to see what will turn up on my next ramble.

INTERSECTIONS

The BLUE RIDGE ROADS that RAISED ME

By RON RASH

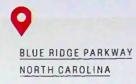


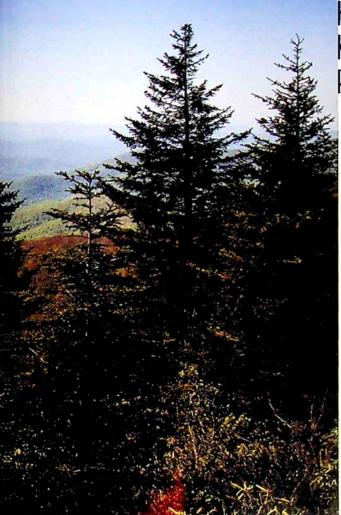
A FEW MILES WEST OF BLOWING ROCK, NORTH CAROLINA,

near milepost 297 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, is Price Lake. In 1972, my cousin Mike and I fished here. He was just back from Vietnam. We fished until dark, little disappointed at our having no luck. His being home safe was all the luck we needed. Drive north a few miles and you'll cross over a stone bridge built by the WPA during the 1930s. The stream that passes underneath is Middlefork Creek, where once I caught a rainbow trout big enough towarrant a paragraph in the Watauga Democrat. Another half mile down on the right is a road that leads to where my aunt Lee and uncle Roy lived. Besides their growing the best corn I've ever eaten, Aunt Lee tended an immense flower garden. One of my earliest memories is of watching butterflies brighten the mountain air above it.

Farther along, you'll come to a pull-off on the right for Thunder Hill Overlook. In daylight the view is marvelous, a blue expanse that appears as endless as the sea. If you come at night to this area, you might look out and see the Brown Mountain Lights. Scientists have theorized that their source is fox fire or automobiles. However, local lore holds that the roving lights are lanterns carried by restless spirits. In their adolescence, my uncles and aunts came here with their dates, but I suspect their focus was not on other worldly matters.

In another mile, if you look closely on the right, you might glimpse some graying locust posts linked by sagging strands of rusty barbed wire. My grandfather built





HOW STRANGE IT WAS AS A CHILD TO KNOW THAT PEOPLE FROM SO MANY PLACES PASSED SO CLOSE TO OUR LIVES

A view of the Appalachian Mountains along the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina.

ow that was once a hayfield. When I was in high school, several afternoons I rode on the back of a battered Ford pickup, stacking hay bales my uncles tossed up to me. Next to the meadow is a small white house that belonged to my great-aunt Nell and great-uncle Col. If you turn right and follow this road, you'll pass a brick house where my cousin Mike now lives. A few more miles and you will enter Dismal Gorge, a shadowy place where my uncles sometimes took me hunting and fishing. Once my uncle Earl and I came upon a rusting whiskey still, perhaps built and tended by one of our relatives, since plenty of kinfolk lived nearby.

On the left side of the parkway is another road. This turnoff was once the site of a general store. On an afternoon in the late 1800s, a group of men gathered here to decide what to call this community. No consensus came until one of the men stretched his arms and yawned: Ah ho. The community had its name. The store closed during the Depression, but my mother remembers lifting an orange soda from the icy slush of the metal box.

You may choose to go farther on the parkway toward Boone, but I will follow this road, which in memory is made of dirt. There is a pasture on the right, on the left a one-story clapboard farmhouse my grandfather built in the 1920s. My aunt Anna Belle lives there now, but I am remembering a summer evening when I was seven years old. I am on the front steps, my grandmother and my parents sitting on the porch. It is past my bedtime, but the thickening night hides me. The voices on the porch have a soft intimacy that makes the dark feel sheltering.

Even at this altitude, there are surrounding hills to block a view, but at night they seem to recede. Stars appear and the sky widens, gains depth. I am getting sleepy. Tomorrow morning I will awake early to the smell of eggs and bacon, for my uncle Earl is taking me fishing. We may go to Price Lake or take a left at the intersection and fish the stream that follows the parkway toward Boone. My cousin Mike will join us. In the afternoon, we'll visit relatives, perhaps cross the parkway to visit Aunt Nell and Uncle Col. My cousins Jeff and Janet will come for supper, and later we'll climb the pasture hill and watch the cars pass. But that is tomorrow.

More stars appear. Soon crickets trill in the pasture. The grass dampens with dew. If I leave the steps and go to sleep, tomorrow and its promises will come sooner. Instead, I wish only to linger on $these \,porch \,steps, listening \,to \,the \,night, listening \,to \,those \,voices.$

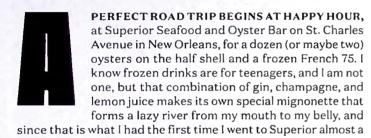
that fence in the 1930s when he decided to raise cattle. In that pasture is a hill atop which, sixty years ago, you might have seen my cousins and me. We would be looking in your direction, playing a game where we guessed the next cartag's color. Sometimes we'd venture closer to the parkway to identify the states: yellow could be Maine or Michigan, white Idaho or Kentucky, and the rarest color of all, the bright red of New Mexico. How strange it was as a child to know that people from so many places passed so close to our lives.

The parkway curves again, and as it straightens you will see an intersection at which there will be a sign that reads, AHO GAP ELEV. 3722 FT. On the right is a meadManatees or Bust

COASTING THE GULF

A LOLLYGAGGER'S IDEAL ITINERARY

By PAN HOUSTON



decade ago, it is hard to imagine one without the other. Arrive early and sit at the bar. Oysters are fresh, cold, plentiful, and seventy-five cents apiece at happy hour, shucked by oyster whisperer Kelly Keefe (one of the few female shuckers in town). Superior has three of the top-ranked shuckers in the state, and not only are they fast, they treat everybody like family. You may wind up with Chauncey Gardner-Johnson's mother on one side of you and George Porter Jr. on the other. And if George Porter Jr. invites

you to hear his band at the Maple Leaf Bar, go!

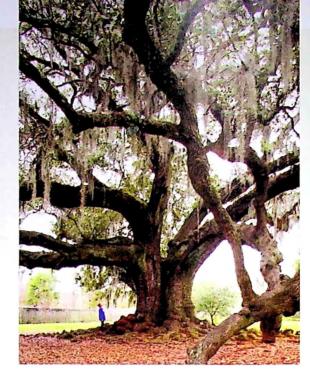
By the time you leave, you'll have new friends, elevated zinclevels (that's why oysters increase sex drive), and a tiny afternoon buzz. It's a good time to wander through Uptown, picking out houses for your alternative NOLA life. Head to Audubon Park to stroll the oval and commune with the black-bellied whistling-ducks, then grab an Uber to Mid-City and Cafe Degas. Ask for a table near the pecan tree, covered with tiny white lights, that grows through the middle of the dining room. If you can stand more oysters (and I can always stand more oysters), order the flash-fried Louisiana oyster salad with Creole tomato bacon vinaigrette. If enough is enough, both the steak frites and the salade Nicoise are authentic and delicious, or onion soup paired with the jumbo lump crab salad makes a beautiful meal. Café Degas is the place to have your first

Sazerac. After dinner, amble through the world's largest mature live oak forest just down the street in City Park.

Next morning it's up and at 'em alongside Lake Pontchartrain and across the border into Mississippi, to the tiny city of Pass Christian. I hope you haven't had your coffee yet.

There are many opinions about who makes the best latte in the world, ranging





from Sant' Eustachio il Caffe in Rome to Espresso Vivace in Seattle, but Cat Island Coffeehouse would give them both a run for their money. That's because Sean Pittman is a perfectionist, a former DuPont chemist who always dreamed of having a coffeehouse. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The first dream in this story belongs to Scott Naugle, an insurance broker who opened Pass Christian Books in a former movie theater in 2002. The store was just starting to catch on when Hurricane Katrina wiped everything out.

"And when I say everything," Naugle says, "I don't just mean the books, I don't just mean the buildings. Two-thirds of the homes in town were gone, and so were the gas lines, the sewers, the sidewalks. At first no one could even think of rebuilding." It was around that time that Naugle met Pittman-in a Starbucks, of all places. They became business partners, and against what seemed like all good sense engaged an architect to build a bookstore-coffeehouse: modern, glass-walled, light-filled, cantilevered over the ravaged Gulf of Mexico like a sail.

Naugle, with his insurance background, wanted to build for wind resistance. Pittman wanted it to be beautiful. All of their friends thought they had lost their minds.

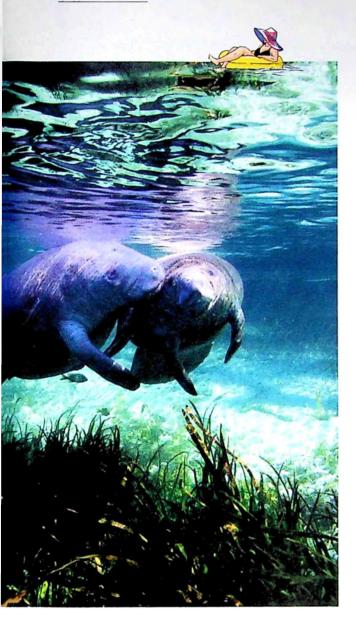
"There was nothing open in town after Katrina," Naugle says. "People said, Have you not heard about Kindles? Books are going away! The builders kept askingus where we wanted to put the flat-screen TV. We'd say, not a coffee shop, a coffee house. We'd laugh later imagining someone setting down their copy of Virginia Woolf's The Waves just in time to see the Saints score a touchdown."

There is no flat-screen TV in Pass Christian Books. but there are several comfy chairs and shelves with books by Jesmyn Ward, Fenton Johnson, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Margaret McMullan, and John Du-





THE GULF COAST



From top: A mother manatee and her calf in Florida's Ichetucknee River: Pass Books/Cat Island in Pass Christian. Mississippi. Opposite, from top: The Tree of Life in New Orleans' Audubon Park, said to have been planted in 17-10; ousters on the half shell.

fresne, each title on the list of books Hove best or am dving to read.

"Even though we are small," Naugle says, "my goal is to have something for every person who walks in that door, and I mean absolutely everybody." Pittman's goals: best coffee, best food, best experience, period. Unhappy with the quality of the baked goods available locally, he rented another building and built a kitchen so they could make their own. Naugle says, "Sean can

pretty much tell you the name of the donkey that carried the freetrade beans down the mountain to the village, which he can also name, as well as the grower, and his kids."

Pass Books/Cat Island played an enormous role in bringing a city that might have been left for dead back to life, an act of love and devotion so enormous that Naugle (who still works full-time for the insurance industry) refuses to talk about it in those terms. "I look around the store and I see a group of people united by intellect and the desire to know more," he says, "and that's good enough for me."

It's about a six-hour drive from Pass Christian to our final destination, in Florida, and it's a little longer if you stay on Route 90 along the coast instead of jumping up to Interstate 10, but I'm going to encourage it anyway. If the diamonds bouncing off the surface of the water, the shorebirds in the sloughs, and the opportunity to linger under the giant live oaks that have withstood centuries of hurricanes aren't reason enough, there is always the promise of grabbing lunch at Taranto's Crawfish in Biloxi, where the only thing better than the po'boys is the conversations you will have in line.

Start with a simple "How are you?" The answer you get might include the failing memory of your line-mate's great-aunt, or how they lost a giant date palm in the last big storm. It might include their feelings about the plan to change the Mississippi state flag. Unlike the "none of your freakin' business" of the Northeast, or the stoic silence of the West, here if you say, "How are you?" people assume you really want to know. Ithink again about Scott Naugle's faith in his neighbors and realize one reason I come down here so often is that the way people talk and listen to one another gives me a particular kind of hope.

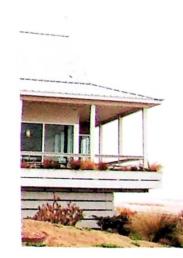
From Taranto's there's a short spur road up to I-10, but I would stay on 90 a little longer, along the Old Spanish Trail and through Pascagoula, where it will traverse the Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge and ease up to I-10 on its own.

The final stop on your wishful trip across the South isn't a stop at all. It's a float, down six gorgeous miles of northern Florida's Ichetucknee River through Ichetucknee Springs State Park. Eight major crystal-clear springs come together to form this stretch of unexpected heaven, so rent yourself an inner tube on the way in, fill your water bottle, and sink into the comfort of water that is always a perfect seventy-two degrees and every color from deepest turquoise to dazzling aquamarine. This is the original lazy river, but comparing the water-park version to the Ichetucknee is a little like comparing bottled French dressing to what you get on your salade Nicoise at Cafe Degas.

Beavers slap their tails, turtles sun on logs, otters tumble, and schools of fish shimmer beneath the surface while you float at a

speed the human body was made for. Suspended in your inner tube, you're in the perfect position to glimpse an American kestrel, a northern bobwhite, or a redheaded woodpecker, to say nothing of the great blue herons, wood ducks, and limpkins sharing the river. If you are really lucky, you might find yourself floating over a manatee, that gentle gray teddy bear of the sea. Nobody commits to a good day of floating with the same dedication as a manateeand perhaps manatees have something to teach us all, here on the other side of too many months of fear and uncertainty.

"Relax," they might say in a rare but not unheard-of manatee-human mind meld. "Let the water hold you, heal you, carry you downriver to whatever comes next."





Toward Home

MEMORY HIGHWAY

DRIVING with MY EYES CLOSED

By WRIGHT THOMPSON

IF THE PRIESTS WERE CORRECT FOR ONCE AND I WERE TO ever go blind, if my world went to shadow and black and I couldn't see a solitary thing, I submit for your consideration that I could still drive from Yazoo City to Greenwood, Mississippi. I know this journey cold. Surely you've got a road like that. A drive you can make without thinking, each turn and straight carefully wrapped and stored in the closets of your memory. I've ridden this road hundreds of times. The first was when I was just weeks old. The last time was a week ago.

The first left took me down a wooded hill away from my uncle Will's house, where he lay in a bed dying. His room overlooked those same woods. I'd come here to say goodbye and in his familiar house, where we'd gathered so many times, I couldn't shake the strangeness of his shrinking world. His entire life now consisted of one room. He was never again to walk down his hall, past his fireplace, through his bright yellow kitchen and into his pantry, where so many memorable meals began. There was something beautiful about this winnowing. His and my aunt Becky's room was the center of the home and their family. It felt like the house itself was alive and in triage, shutting down unnecessary extremities.

Uncle Will loved that Delta drive, too, often taking it instead of the quicker route down the highway. Every mile held another memory, so in a metaphysical way, his moving along the road was the story of his life. That he liked that road was an unsurprising

but new fact about him, and the realization that there were things still to learn, and with time rushing away, things that I would never learn, left me feeling unmoored. Aunt Becky told me that detail with a smile, in an accent suggesting a fragility that I can testify does not exist. A crisis reveals her backbone and strength. She is unbreakable and was in charge of these precious days. There's a saying my dad had about his mother-in-law that applies to my aunt, too: When Becky says it's Easter, it's time to start dying your eggs.

The next right pointed me toward the Yazoo Country Club, which always evokes a half-remembered story about my grandfather being made to feel less than by polite society folks and how his superior golf game was the way a country boy told city people to go to hell.

Itook a right on U.S. 49.

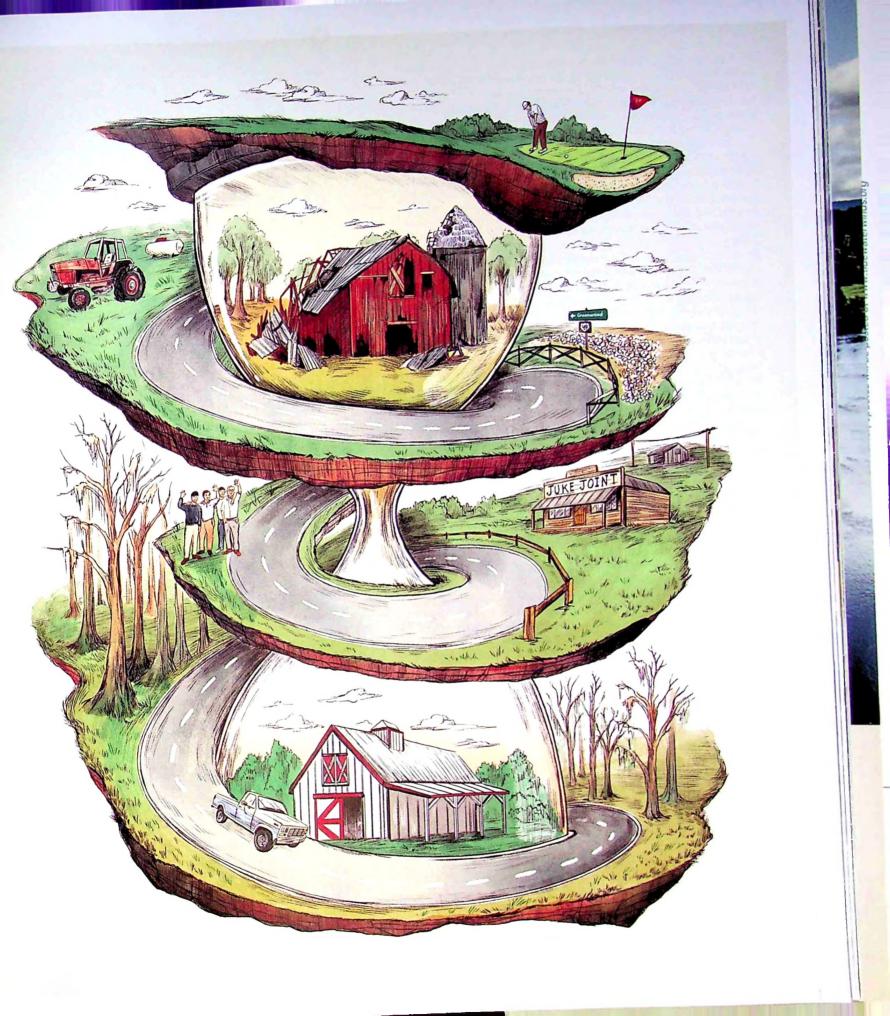
The road turned country fast. Little farm towns like Renshaw. Abandoned cotton gins. New metal barns erected next to collapsing rotten wooden ones—a juxtaposition that toys with the structure

of time and reality; a philosopher's dream, as if to say: You might be new and shiny now, but one day you will be like me. American Ozymandias. Look on my works and despair, rushing past the Eden Midway Road, A big sweeping loop at Bee Lake, and the juke joint in Thornton, where I imagined the guitars moaning and ringing like lone and level sands. Maybe they just have a stereo now. A closed country store that once served bologna and hoop cheese sandwiches. Where did all those people go? Who raises money for them with a counter jar whenever their kids need an operation down in Jackson?

I tried to find a spot on the left side of the road that my dad always talked about, but I couldn't find the landmark. Old propane tanks, I think. Or maybe a power facility? Without that visual trigger, the story floated just beyond my ability to recall. I could see the shore but couldn't reach it. A panic set in. My dad used to narrate this stretch of road with stories of his childhood and young adulthood. I remember my mom and I laughing and rolling our eyes as he told the same story at the same place, a story I now couldn't remember. It was about some old football game, I think? Maybe baseball. My whole job as a son is to remember his stories so he doesn't die again and again. What a betrayal then to lose this part of his life that I'd been entrusted to remember. Did it happen in Thornton? Mileston? I looked out at the skeletal trees of Delta winter thick on the banks of bayous and creeks, like even the land knew there was a great man dying behind me. Uncle Will is my dad's older brother.

There were four boys altogether, and they grew up on a farm outside Bentonia: Frazier, Will, Walter, and Michael. Nowonly Will and Michael are left. Yesterday was Michael's seventy-second birthday, and Will is dying in his bedroom. The hospice nurses said a month. Then a week. My cousin, Will's son, told me to come quick. I sat in the wooden chair by his bed and wept. ! told him I understood I'd never see him again, and how much I appreciated the love he'd shown me, and how I hoped he'd tell my daddy hello in heaven. He gripped





my hand and said, "Thank you for caring for me," and with those words in my head, I walked out of the room and let his grandson take my place in the chair. Minutes were as precious then as fine sandy loam. People were generous with each other in that unspoken way.

Everything else at the house was a blur, and now I was on this familiar road, looking at the barren trees and the silver blanket of winter coming down. I didn't turn on the radio and tried for miles to remember. The roadside played its own music. Tchula snuck up fast, the Triple S grocery buzzing with pickup truck crossroads energy across the highway from a prehistoric-looking cypress swamp, the same color as the collapsing houses up and down the road. It hought about my uncle Michael, who would soon be the only Thompson brother left. A terrible responsibility will be his alone to shoulder. No one will share his memories of his parents and of their parents, of life on that farm in the years they called it home—both a place and a time endangered and vulnerable. The unwinding road felt familiar but also foreign, like a thing breaking into pieces and slipping through my fingers. There are Indian mounds all around this road, and it occurred to me that we don't know a single thing about the men and women buried in them. We don't even know what language they spoke, or their hopes, dreams, and fears. The land shows they existed but nothing more. The Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney wrote, "History says, Don't hope," and this is what he meant, I think. That memory is a half-hearted matador wave at unstoppable forces we can barely name, much less understand.

A sign outside Greenwood had a faded, worn cotton plant on it. That felt about right. As a child, I'd want to go to a fast-food chain when we got here, but my dad always insisted we stop at Malouf's deli. Now lunderstand why. I don't remember what we ordered, but when we finished, we'd make the turn toward Clarksdale, where we lived when I was growing up. Now I go the other way and head to Oxford (where I live with my wife and daughters), through Teoc, near the overgrown grave of the Choctaw chief who signed the treaty that gave this dirt to the United States. Mississippi is made from the broken pieces of things that used to be, by memories preserved and vanished, by myths and traumas, and by the roads and roadsides where all those things live.

I got back home just as a winter storm started, and as the land turned cold and bleak, my uncle Will died. He left this world just after midnight, fourteen hours after I said goodbye, surrounded by his children and by their children, who prayed with him and sang him hymns. His body lay in a bed that looks out over a forest of trees, which looks out over a highway, which follows a railroad that follows an old forest path, which follows rivers and streams and bayous. I wondered what his spirit saw when it rose out of this place. Did he only stare upward in wonder at a kingdom where nothing and no one is ever lost to time? Or maybe, just once, he looked over his shoulder to see for a final time the dominion of frail humans who are forever trying and failing to hold safe the people and places we love.

THE UNWINDING ROAD FELT FAMILIAR BUT ALSO FOREIGN, LIKE A THING BREAKING INTO PIECES AND SLIPPING THROUGH MY FINGERS



The Slow Lane

RIDE OF PASSAGE

SALUTING the SPIRITS of OLD FLORIDA

By TAYLOR BROWN

E CROSS THE FLORIDA LINE AT NOON, thundering through forests of spindly back-road pines. Tar snakes slither before us, gluing the road together in kinks. We've been circling Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp-the most primeval of Southern wilds, which survived the drainage attempts of former Confederate officers and the ravages of forest fires said to rain ash and smoldering moss on towns downwind.

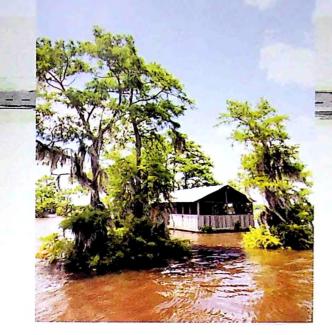
It's 1999. Spring. I'm sixteen years old. My father and lare riding our motorcycles in echelon, our boots kicked out on the pegs. We're on the way to my grandmother's house, around the swamp and across the Panhandle, to Fort Walton Beach.

My father loves to strike out riding for the coasts of Florida where he grew up. He follows serpentine byways and dead-straight alligator alleys, finding his way to little-known fishing villages, the last bastions of Old Florida where shrimp boats sit on blocks and canned beers slide across plywood bars and people watch the sun crash into the Gulf of Mexico. During his lifetime, these villages will give way at a dizzying clip to highrise condominiums and golf carts; he'll be forced to look ever harder for the Florida he once knew.

Sometimes he rides across the Alabama and Mississippi coasts to New Orleans, never taking the interstate. No, he follows the same highways he took as a youngerman, night drives along U.S. 90 when my mother rode shotgun, the moon dashing off the water at Mobile, Pascagoula, Biloxi, Gulfport. The white sands blazing right there alongside the road.

Idon't knowit yet-Iwon't realize it for nearly twenty years-but this 1999 ride is to be my indoctrination into the American road trip, and the first of my journeys along the Gulf Coast, a path that will wear a deep groove in my heart. Years later, I'll make this drive on the high of my first book tour, headed for Octavia Books in New Orleans, and I'll make it again later that year, in the June heat of my AC-less car, looking for a new place to write. I'll make the trip every year to see





Deep in Louisiana's Atchafalaya Swamp.

my NOLA family-my aunt and several close friendsand it's the ride I'll complete in honor of my father after his death. It even became the basis of Wingwalkers, my novel in which a pair of Depression-era barnstormers coax their dilapidated biplane across the Gulf Coast, headed for a rendezvous with William Faulkner in New Orleans.

Maybe that's just how books come to light. They're born from truth, sprung from our deepest places.

This past February I made the trip again, only in the opposite direction. After nearly a year of the pandemic, our little family here in Savannah was craving the road. But three dogs and two adults don't fit so well on a motorbike. In Texas, just outside Houston, I'd found the answer, a 1994 GMC camper van. Yes, it was more than twenty-five years old, but it was in the budget, outfitted for travel, and driving it home, I'd pass right through the country of my own history and heart.

Five hours after landing in Houston, I was on the road in the new rig, rumbling over the Sabine River into Louisiana. I passed the smoking refineries around Lake Charles, strangely pretty in the early dusk, and then I was riding high over the watery expanse of the Atchafalaya Swamp, looking down at the fishing camps floating beneath the interstate.

Dawn found me passing the Tiger Truck Stop just west of Baton Rouge, where I'd once seen the poor mascot that inspired my novel Pride of Eden. A barefoot man had gotten out of his truck next to me, squinting at the caged tiger. "lain't realized there was two of them!" he said. There weren't.

This time I didn't stop. I had a drive-by visit with a friend in New Orleans, then I chugged on in the slow lane, feeling a little guilty for the comfort of the captain's chairs, the ease with which I could park nearly anywhere and spend the night. Most of my Gulf Coast road trips have been on motorcycles, in cars without AC, or in the open cockpit of an imagined biplane, with the wind blasting my face and little idea where I might spend the night. To me, that's the magic of the American road trip-the undiscovered, the unexplored. The search for supper and a place to lay your weary head.

I thought back to '99, when we struck the Big Bend of Florida. We'd planned to stop halfway to my grandmother's house, but we'd forgotten it was spring break, the coast flooded with college kids in swim gear and plastic wristbands, the neon NO illuminated on all the motel vacancy signs. We had to keep on riding.

Twenty-two years later, east bound in the van, I was trying to make DeFuniak Springs for the night, just thirty miles from my grandmother's old house. Though Ididn't realize it, I was slowly converging with those two riders of my past, a father and a son riding west.

Legend has it a meteorite made Lake DeFuniak, the nearly circular lake at the center of town. I wanted to stay at the Hotel DeFuniak, built in 1920 - a taste of bygone Florida, in honor of my old man. I arrived at dusk to find I'd be the only guest that night. When the manager asked what room I wanted, I jokingly replied that Ijust didn't want one of the haunted ones. He raised an eyebrow. "Ah, then you know the history of this place?"

Mysmile hungon my face. I did not. Nor did I want to know-not until the next morning, at least. Still, I felt this rendezvous was meant to be. I'm a storyteller, after all, and here in Walton County, near the terminus of my first real road trip with my father, I felt undaunted. Besides, I had a van to jump in if things got too hairy.

The halls were long and narrow; my footsteps echoed. I had a powerful dose of Wild Turkey before bed and got to sleep without a hitch. I woke once in the middle of the night, and I did hear things I can't readily explain. Footsteps on the ceiling, eerie sounds through the walls. The groans of century-old cypress timbers, perhaps. Perhaps something else. I kept my eyes closed and thought back to that trip in '99.

In my mind, we were crossing the long bridge into Apalachicola again, the dark for tress of a thunderhead pulsing and cracking in the dusk, its ramparts fissuring in webs of lightning. The string lights of the Gulf Coast lay before us, a whole galaxy wired along the thin edge of the continent. I was riding one-handed, hunched over the gas tank, saddle-sore, while my father rode straight-backed, unbowed by hours or miles. His arms held high, his boots kicked wide.

We made it to my grandmother's house just before midnight. We'd done some five hundred miles. I was dazed and aching, and I'll remember that moment for the rest of my life. I felt I'd earned something that day, a story or vision, and it's one I revisit again and again. I returned to it that night at the Hotel DeFuniak: the pair of us streaking over the cold gunmetal of the bay in echelon, outrunning the storm. My father's taillight glowing like a beacon in the falling dusk, red-bright, showing me the way.

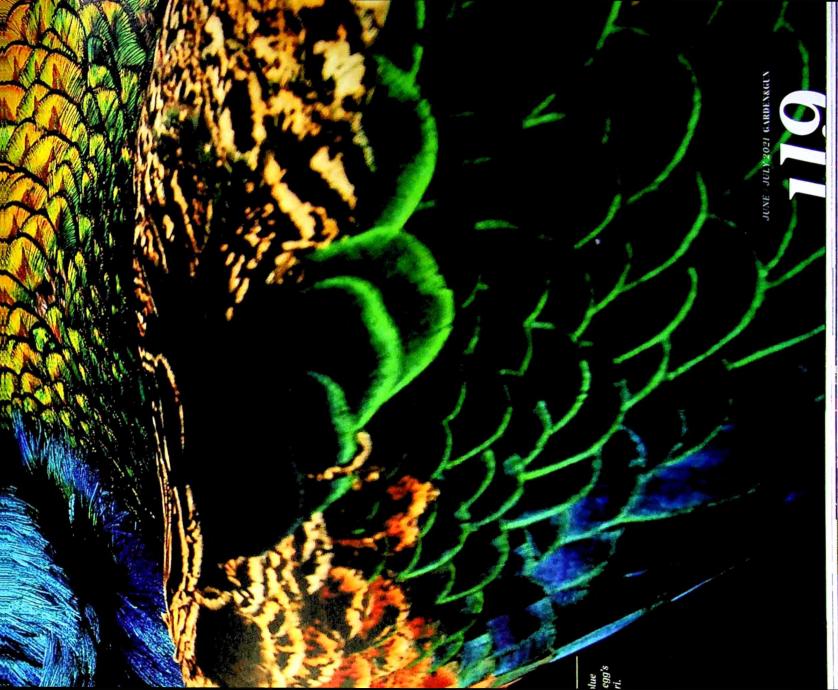
I fell fast asleep among the ghosts of Old Florida. ready for the next leg of my journey.

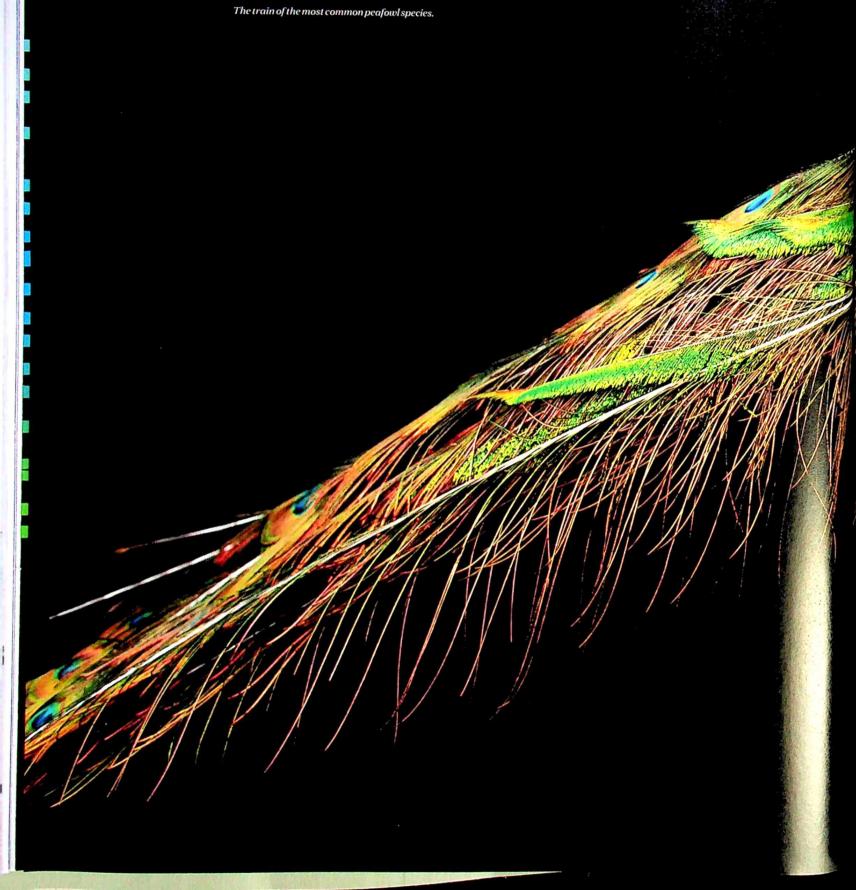


STEEL, MIDNIGHT, PEACH, HAZEL, PLATINUM, TAUPE, JADE—DRIVEN by the THRILL of CREATION and DISCOVERY, the MISSOURI FARMER BRAD LEGG HAS ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY SPURRED the PROLIFERATION of CRAZY-COLORED PEACOCKS

BH SEAN FLYNN —

Photographs by SAM RAETZ







RAD LEGG WAS PACKING UP HIS PEACOCKS AT THE END OF an animal auction in Nebraska when a boy approached him with a polite question.

"Mr. Legg," he said, "I've got a peacock, and I don't know what it is. If I told you the colors, could you tell me?"

Legg was the obvious person to ask about a strange peacock even back then, in the autumn of 1998. The regulars at the auctions in Tennessee and Ohio and Kansas, anywhere within driving distance of Legg's Missouri farm, were used to seeing him pull in with a trailer full of peafowl—black shoulders and whites, Spaldings and cameos and plain old India blues. In the peafowl world-peafowl being the collective noun for peacocks, peahens, and peachicks-

Legg was a celebrity: A few years earlier, one of his birds had appeared on the cover of The Peacock Journal ("a national peafowl and alternative livestock publication"). It was a silver pied, believed to have been the first of its kind hatched in North America.

"Sure I could," Legg said to the boy. "What's it look like?"

Green neck, the boy told him, cinnamon body, pastel train, kind of pale.

Probably misidentifying a purple peacock, Legg thought. Maybe a cameo. But the

boy said no, he'd seen pictures of both, and his bird wasn't either. The boy's father happened along. He confirmed the description and said he'd never seen anything like it.

Legg's pulse quickened. "Do you have any pictures?"

"No, sir."

Legg's son Brandon looked up at him. He was ten years old. "Dad," he whispered, "we gotta go see it."

It was six o'clock on a Sunday night. The drive home took five hours; Brandon and his sister had school in the morning; their mom, Patsy, had to go to work; and Legg had to be at the Fuji plant, his real job, making sure a few thousand rolls of film were properly processed. And he was still packing up the birds, more than a dozen, that he hadn't sold because the bids came in too low.

Legg looked at the boy's father. "How far away do you live?"

They drove ninety minutes northwest, away from Missouri and into the sandhills, then another twenty on back roads and dirt until they came to a spread with an old dairy barn and, in front of it, a pen of rough timber and wire. The father disappeared inside.

"He walks this bird out," Legg says now, more than twenty years later, "and I'm standing there fricking dumbfounded."

"Your mouth just drops," Brandon says.

"It was a new color. It was a jade," Legg says. He pauses, eyes wide. "I just... I get goose bumps just telling this story again."

I FIRST MET BRADLEGG IN THE FALL OF 2018, UNTIL WHICH TIME I BELIEVED

I knew exactly what a peacock looked like. Gangly bird, about the size of a small turkey, with an enormous train fanning out into an arc that, because the feathers are iridescent, shimmers with turquoise and azure and emerald and copper and magenta. A Seussian crest sprouts from the head, like a bouquet of Whoville flowers, and the breast and neck are an unreal cobalt, the color of fairy-tale lakes. I knew there was the odd white one, but by and large peacocks were gleaming blue birds with big, beautiful feathers.

This was a failure of my imagination.

I was in Missouri for the twenty-fifth annual convention of the United Peafowl

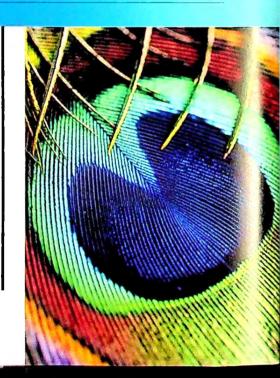


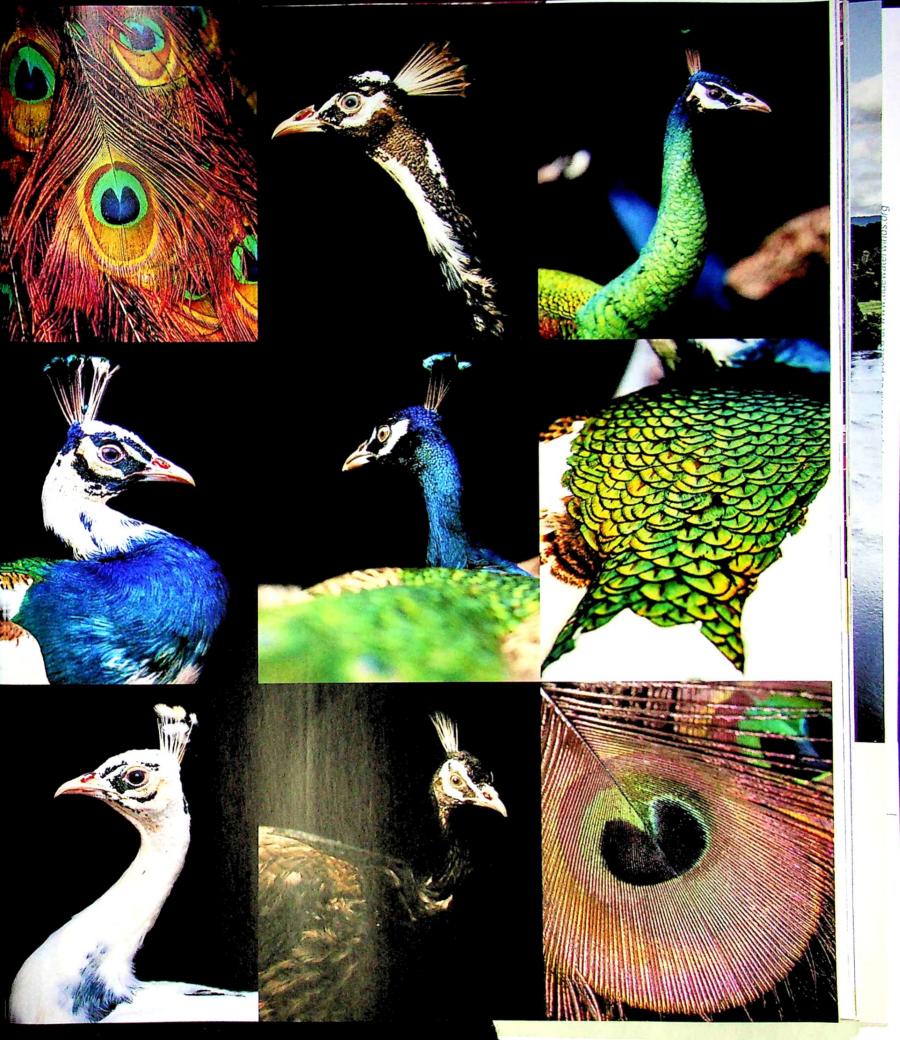


Top row: A jade peafowl, a variety Brad Legg found by happenstance in Nebraska; the train feathers of a midnight variety; an opal pied; a Spalding.

Middle row: Brad Legg, who began raising peafowl at age ten, with a steel variety; an India blue pied, one of the first established mutations; an India blue: the mantle of an India blue pied.

Bottom row: An ocellus, or eyespot, of an India blue feather; an India blue silver pied; a charcoal black-shoulder variety; the ocelli of a jade's train feathers.





Association—a totally real thing to which I have paid membership dues. A year earlier, I'd bought two peacocks and a peahen. They were surprisingly cheap, \$125 for the trio, and I'd grown quite fond of them, but they were not a well-considered purchase. Two boys and a girl, in fact, proved an untenable imbalance of avian hormones, so I'd already had to add another hen. I'd turned to the UPA for help, and a full-on peafowl convention was, like peacocks themselves, one of those things I'd never considered until the opportunity presented itself.

The UPA convened that year at the Four Points near the Kansas City airport because the hotel is less than fifteen miles from Legg's Peafowl Farm. "It's like Disneyland!" one of my fellow conventioneers squealed when Legg's pens came into view, 150 low sheds of lumber and sheet metal with long, wired runs set out in rows and filled with birds.

Very few of those birds, relatively speaking, were blue. Or bright.

Legg's is not the largest peafowl operation around: During the summer hatching season, an average of three thousand peacocks, peahens, and peachicks fill the property, a respectable but not overwhelming number. Yet Legg has bred them in 189 varieties, far more than anyone else in the country and, quite possibly, on the planet. And that number is out of date. In 2018, when the

UPA had already recognized 225 varieties bred in ten colors and five patterns, the organization also approved seven new colors Legg presented—two of which he had found and one he had actually conjured—and one new pattern. Since each color can be bred in ten different varieties from patterns and combinations of patterns—a jade (color) black-shoulder pied white-eyed (three patterns), for example—and each mutant of the common India blue species can be crossed with a green peafowl to make a hybrid called a Spalding, that constituted 140 potential new varieties right there. At least five more (not yet officially recognized) colors have been found or created since, and Legg is developing more.

At the time, I was unclear as to why, or even how, one might improve upon the original peacock. It is a bird of myth and legend—guarding the gates of paradise, consorting with the goddess queen Hera, embroidered



on Elvis's favorite Vegas-era jumpsuit-for a reason: A peacock is an ethereally beautiful bird. That it is an illogical bird, a forest dweller weighted with an ungainly carpet of sparkly feathers trailing from a shamelessly brilliant body, only adds to its wonder. It is a bird not just of myth but possibly of magic, having not been eaten into extinction by jaguars.

And yet people tinker. So very human of us. If a bird is beautiful, someone will believe it can be made more beautiful, or at least different, which is its own kind of beauty. Someone like Brad Legg.

"I like having something no one else has," Legg told me one afternoon on his farm among the endless rows of pens. A sturdy man of sixty-one, with white hair and rough hands, he doesn't look like a fancier of birds, let alone fancy ones. "And if I have that something, I want to make it in the hardest variety of every kind."

One of the hardest varieties to create, for the rec-

ord, is a male purple black-shoulder silver pied. It took Legg twelve years to hatch one, and it is, he says, "the most beautiful bird we ever raised."

TO BE CLEAR, THE LEGGS AND OTHER BREEDERS ARE WORKING WITH new varieties of peafowl, not species, of which only three exist: green peafowl, which are endangered in the wild and relatively delicate; Congo peafowl, which are smaller and rarely seen outside of a handful of zoos; and the hardy, ubiquitous India blue, native to the subcontinent but long since spread across the planet, like starlings and zebra mussels.

In simple terms, Legg and others are isolating India blues with rare genetic mutations that affect their color or pattern and breeding them in very targeted ways-this cock with that hen, the resulting chicks with this hen and that cockuntil they establish a line that breeds true and healthy. That is, in other words, until a jade hen and a jade cock reliably produce jade chicks. Most of those mutations occur naturally, and seem to be mainly aesthetic, not significantly different from the way a human gene will produce red hair or blue eyes. Others get created in the pen. Legg eventually developed taupe peafowl, for instance, from an initial mating of a purple hen and a regular-looking India blue cock,

and peach began with a cameo cock and a purple hen.

This is all quite modern. The first three India blue mutations-white; pied, where the bird is splotched with white; and black shoulder, in which the wings have deep blue-black feathers instead of striated brown and beige ones-were all known by the 1800s. Yet the next recognized mutant didn't show up until 1967, a brownish bird hatched in Maine and initially called a silver dun before the name was changed to cameo.

Brad Legg hatched his first peachicks a few years later. He grew up on a cattle farm, watching his father tinker with his own hybrids. Brad was the youngest of four, and when he was very small, four or five, his parents would play cards with their nearest neighbor, who had a peacock. "I'd sit out there and watch this bird for two or three hours while they played cards," Legg says. "I don't remember this, but my mother said I told her, 'I'm gonna have peacocks when I get older.'"

When he was ten, Legg bought around a dozen peafowl eggs through a family friend for a dollar apiece, borrowed an incubator, and hatched his first flock. This was unusual in Missouri, raising peafowl, but not so much as it would have been in, say, Brooklyn. Legg was a farm boy, after all. He and his brother took turns picking first which calf to raise for 4-H, and he reared Suffolk sheep and Checkered Giant rabbits and Cochin chickens. "I won everything I showed in," he says. "Got to where they hated to see the Leggs coming."

(He did not show peacocks, however, because there are no peacock shows. It is the damned estirony: There

are rabbit shows and chicken shows and cattle shows and Miss Universe pageants, yet a bird known specifically for its beauty, a creature with no useful purpose other than to be ogled, has no formal arena in which its appearance can be judged. The reason is that the peacocks would have to be taken to such shows in very large cages, "and they're not gentle in strange places," Legg says. "They fly up and break their necks.")

By age sixteen, Legg had whites and black shoulders among his two dozen or so India blues. Four years later, he'd added the truly exotic varieties: pied peacocks he bought as chicks from an Oklahoma man whose pied cock purportedly was the first in the United States, having come from a zoo in Mexico City; and ten cameo chicks he'd bought before they'd even hatched. He paid \$100 for each—roughly \$330 in today's money—a crazy price for chicks, but they were different.

Legg managed a cattle farm at that time, but he sold a few birds on the side. The peafowl market always proved a healthy niche, especially for the more exotic birds. In the mid-eighties, for instance, he had a surplus of whites, so



Above: A midnight, a variety Legg first discovered at a Kansas auction.

Left: In the winter, the males Legg will take to market in sprina-includ ing, here, an India blue, a black shoulder, a silver pied, a Spalding, and a white variety-roost in the barn to keep their trains in good condition.

he spent \$7.34 for a two-line classified in the Kansas City Star. "First thing in the morning, that phone started ringing and people started coming," he says. "They were fighting to get to the farm first." He can't recall exactly what kind of person raced to buy a white peacock in the eighties, except for the guy in a white Cadillac who owned a nursery and said the birds put people in a spending mood. But he does remember he made \$1,100 that Sunday.

Meanwhile, the eighties began a burst of new mutants. The white-eyed pattern—named for the color of the iconic eyespots on the peacock's train—stabilized in California. Purple and charcoal popped up in Arizona, and in Tennessee a man named Buford Abbott, shortly before he died, found a dark metallic-colored bird now known as Buford Bronze. Both peach and opal took hold in the early 1990s.

In 1992, Legg attended a small-animal sale in Kansas. The lots up for auction included a little shoebox containing a tiny white chick with two tan spots on its neck. "It was just the weirdest-looking peachick that'd ever been seen, ever," Legg says. "I didn't know what it was, but it was going home with me."

Legg couldn't stay, so he asked his friend to buy it for him when it came up for bid.

"Okay. What's your limit?"

"I don't have a limit," Legg said. "You're not listening to me: Buy the bird."

That weird peachick cost Legg \$210. A year later, two more of those peculiar birds showed up in different flocks around the country. All three could be traced back to those white-eyed birds developed in California, a genetic stew of white, white-eyed, and pied India blues that became known as silver pied. Legg's

silver pied appeared on the cover of *The Peacock Journal*.

"When that magazine hit publication," Legg says, "in forty-eight hours we had phone calls from twenty-six states wanting to buy it." The appearance of this bizarre peacock, like a white bird flecked with glitter paint, sparked new growth in the market. "And the next one that sent it over the top," Legg says, "was midnight."

Midnight was another happenstance find, an odd bird in a box at an auction in Kansas. Legg had intended to skip that sale, too, and only went because Brandon, who was ten at the time, wanted to go. "That was game day for me," Brandon says. "I didn't do sports. Soccer was on Saturday and the sales were on Saturday, and I had to pick one. I went with the animals. It gets in your blood."

Legg bought the midnight bird, a blackish cock, for \$32.50 in the autumn of 1998. A few weeks later, he and Brandon found themselves gawping at that jade bird in Nebraska. The farmer didn't want to sell, though: His boy had bid on the birds Legg had decided not to sell at the auction, and he'd happily

 $trade\ that\ jade\ cock, and\ two\ matching\ hens, for\ a\ pair\ of\ Legg's\ birds.$

Legg gave the boy every peafowl he had left, fourteen if memory serves. He still thinks he got the better end of the deal.

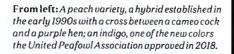
LEGG'S PEAFOWL FARM ACCOMMODATES 150 BREEDING PENS, WHERE specific peacocks are housed with specific peahens to produce a specific variety of chick. Beyond breeding the more established varieties and getting reliable genetic results—a black-shoulder cock and a black-shoulder hen, for instance, will produce black-shoulder chicks—everything gets progressively more complicated, depending on the color, the patterns, and the combinations. Some of the colors, like purple and cameo, are sex-linked recessive,

which means the male carries them without necessarily showing the characteristics. Silver pieds require that jumble of three different mutations. Breed a black shoulder with a plain India blue and none of the chicks will look like black shoulders but all of them will carry the black-shoulder gene. So if you want a male purple black-shoulder silver pied? Of course, it took Legg twelve years to produce it.

"That's a charcoal black-shoulder silver pied," he tells me during a later visit, pointing at a white male splotched with dark gray. "I can make that same bird in a Spalding, and I can do it"—he wheels, points to another pen—"right there." (It's more complicated than that, requiring several, perhaps many, generations. But the process would *start* in that pen.) A Spalding is a hybrid developed in the 1930s by a bird fancier named Eudora Spalding, who wanted to inject the cold hardiness of the India blue into the more elegant frame of the warm-weather greens. At this point, there's a Spalding version of just about every variety.

Legg has operated his peafowl farm full-time since 200l, when he went part-time at the Fuji plant (he left for good in 2006, when digital cameras killed the film industry). The growth has been exponential, and he



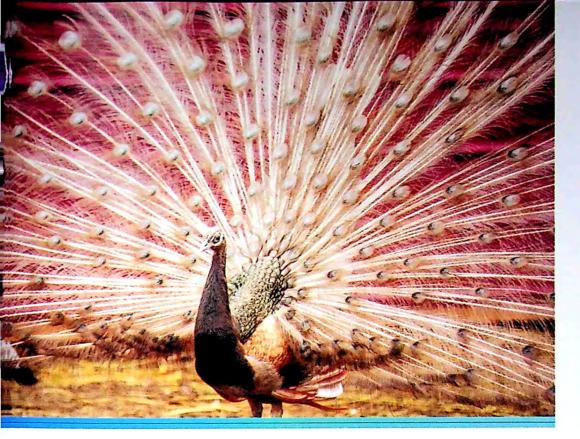




Opposite: A Montana struts its stuff; Legg found the beige variety in its namesake state in 2013, and the UPA also approved it as a new peafowl color in 2018.

measures it by the generations. When he was twenty, Legg had five kinds of peafowl. When Brandon turned twenty, in 2008, there were eighty-seven varieties on the farm. A decade later, when his son Dallas turned twenty—there was a ten-year gap between the second and third of the Leggs' four kids—the family was raising about two hundred types of peacocks and peahens.

It's meticulous work, keeping track of all those chicks in all those varieties. They write on each egg the number of the pen where it was laid, and as a rule, that's done before leaving the pen to avoid confusion. They



place the egg under a Cochin bantam for at least two weeks (so the peahens can continue laying), and then they shine a light through the shell to see if a bird is developing. The fertile ones go into an incubator for another couple of weeks until they're moved to a hatcher, each pen's eggs grouped in a separate compartment so the midnight pieds don't get mixed up with the cameo black shoulders. That happens on a Saturday so the chicks all hatch at roughly the same time. On Tuesday, they mail out chicks to customers who have prepaid for an eight-pack of the more common varieties, eight being enough to generate sufficient body heat. The rest get tagged with a numbered clip in each wing.

The Leggs have clipped more than twenty-seven thousand chicks over the years, and sold tens of thousands of day-old chicks, give or take. They can't breed enough to keep up. "The peafowl market's been going up for twenty years," Legg tells meas he stops his golf cart in front of a pen. "There hasn't been a down year yet. Everything's hot now." His birds aren't cheap. Aside from the \$200 India blue male, the least expensive one on his list, a white cock, costs \$350, and a pair of India blue yearlings go for \$450. Prices rise significantly with the degree of breeding difficulty.

I nod toward the charcoal black-shoulder silver pied. "How much for him?" Legg is quiet for a moment. He's pretty positive it's one of the only male charcoal black-shoulder silver pieds in existence. And it took him twenty years to make.

"Oh, I guess—" he starts, then pauses. "Well, I wouldn't even know how to price it."

THAT FIRST TIME I VISITED LEGG'S PEAFOWL Farm, with the UPA, Daniel Potente was there, too. He's the president of the association, and birds are in his blood. His father had birds and his father had birds and so on, back at least four generations, probably more. It had rained all week, and we were standing in mud in front of a pen of Montana peafowl, one of the new colors approved that year, along with ivory, platinum, steel, indigo, hazel, and mocha.

"Not a lot of blue here, Danny," I said.

"Yeah, but that's a beautiful bird," he replied

"It is," I agreed. "It just doesn't look like a peacock."

A Montana bird is beige. Legg got a call about it in 2013, from a woman in Montana who was trying to figure out what these strange-hued birds were. He started swerving off the road, he got so excited, and when he called Brandon to tell him, Brandon asked, "Why aren't you driving to Montana already?" ("When we get a call, we go," Brandon told me later. He and his father have visited fortytwo states looking at odd birds.)

Brandon ended up driving the almost 1,900 miles to Montana with

his wife, toddler daughter, two-month-old baby, and, in the back, nine peafowl to trade with the woman. It took him the better part of a day, and he busted three nets, but eventually he caught two beige males, a beige chick, some hens and another cock that might have been the parents, and six eggs that he nestled in a heating pad for the long drive home.

That's the curious thing about the exotic new varieties. A few-taupe, ivory, and peach, for example—were created. But the found ones have mostly been castoffs, birds other people didn't want. The farmer with the jades would have happily traded for a single pair of brighter birds. The man who sold the midnight asked Legg why he was so interested in a mutant, and Legg told him it was because his neck wasn't blue. "Well, hell," the guy said, "that's why I'm selling him. He's supposed to have a blue neck."

Lunderstood what he meant. "A lot of these colors," I said to Potente, "aren't, you know, colors."

"Get outta here. Of course they're colors. Did you see the platinum? Steel?" (Legg found the steel at a swap meet in 2011. Thought it was a midnight until Dallas finally put their trains side by side.)

"I did. Not peacock colors."

He raised an eyebrow at me.

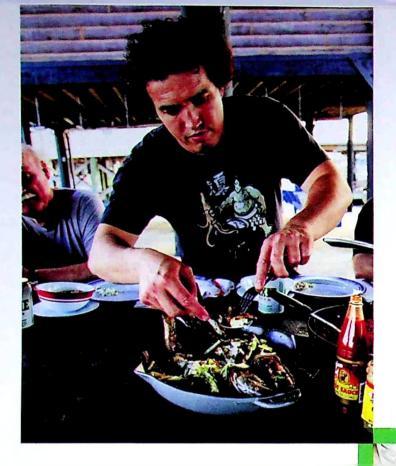
"A Montana peacock," I said, "is never going to be written into a fairy tale."

The Leggs get that. "Honestly, it's just an eye-appeal thing," Brandon says. "It's no different than how some people like spotted horses and some people like solid horses, and some people like spotted dogs and some people like solid dogs, Same thing."

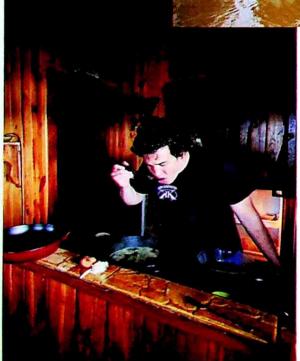
And beauty isn't always physical, tangible. The act of creation can be as beautiful as-often more beautiful than-the creation itself. A charcoal blackshoulders ilver pied is not, to my eye, a particularly attractive bird. But the fact that it exists, that possibly only one exists, is breathtaking.

There will be more, too. Legg and his children are still combining this bird with that one. Brandon keeps about four hundred birds, and if the Leggs come across something rare, they put half at his place, dividing the stock in case a storm blows through or a pen catches fire. "If there's something I tried to make and haven't," Legg says, "it's only because it hasn't happened yet."

And they're still looking, always looking. "They're out there," Brandon says. "Mutants, new colors, they're out there, all across America today. They're just waiting to be found."









Photographs by
PETER FRANK EDWARDS

Clockwise from bottom left: Chef Erling Wu-Bower checks his fish stock; Bayou Log Cabins in Port Sulphur, Louisiana; Wu-Bower serves up grilled fish while his father, Calvin Bower, looks on; Galatoire's fried soft-shell crabs; a speckled trout comes aboard; New Orleans' Preservation Hall; Wu-Bower and his father stirring it up.

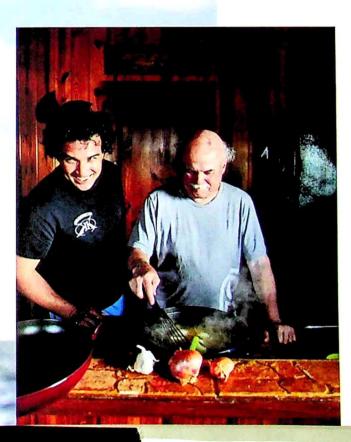


CAJUN RIFF

THE ROOTS of **CHEF ERLING WU-BOWER'S** ACCLAIMED COOKING—and HIS OUTLOOK on LIFE—TRACE DIRECTLY BACK to HIS LOUISIANA HERITAGE, a CULTURAL GUMBO of BAYOU FISH CAMPS, NEW ORLEANS JAZZ CLUBS, and a FAMILY WHO GIVES IT to HIM STRAIGHT

By T. EDWARD NIGKENS





IT'S A BIT OF AN IMPROVISATIONAL PERFORMANCE TONIGHT.

For starters, Erling Wu-Bower is a long way from Chicago, where his mash-up of cross-cultural cuisine has won him accolades, including status as a three-time James Beard Award finalist. He's worked the kitchens at some of the Windy City's upper-echelon restaurants-among them Avec, the Publican, and Nico Osteria. In the spring of 2018, he opened Pacific Standard Time to glowing write-ups in the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, Wired, and elsewhere. But he insists that this place feels most like home: the Spartan kitchen of a Louisiana fish camp on stilts, a half dozen ingredients on a rough countertop, fresh fish on the cutting board, a bayou and family close at hand.

Under his gaze, shrimp shells stew in a rich stock. Fresh speckled trout marinate in fennel, shallots, garlic, and wine. At Wu-Bower's shoulder, his father, Calvin Bower, stirs a roux in a cast-iron pan. Bower is no stranger to performance, either. He grew up in South Louisiana in the 1940s, the son of a Southern Baptist preacher. He learned to play piano and piano accordion so he could lead hymns at his father's tiny mission churches in Port Sulphur, Belle Chasse, Empire, and Buras. Some of the



churches were so small that their congregants paid his father in fish. "Blessed Assurance," The Old Rugged Cross'—those hymns set my life in its direction," Bower says. As professor emeritus of musicology at the University of Notre Dame, he now studies the history of sacred music in the Middle Ages. He has served as choir director for the Notre Dame basilica, and recently published an award-winning translation and commentary on the liturgical poetry of the ninth-century Benedictine monk Notker Balbulus.

As did many Cajun children, Bower learned to cook with passion. He was only eight years old when his father gave him a cypress pirogue, a ticket to the fish-rich bayous around Port Sulphur. Today he has andouille sausage and fresh file-the ground sassafras leaf that is an essential finisher to authentic gumbo-shipped north to his home in Chicago. It's not a stretch to say that Bower may be the only medieval musicologist who can catch, clean, and cook an alligator gar, and it would be hard to find another Cajun who once owned an apartment in Munich to serve as a locus for his research throughout Europe.

Nor has he forgotten how to chunk bait toward a Gulf of Mexico rock jetty. Listening to the repartee in the kitchen reminds me of a moment earlier in the afternoon, as we were fishing for redfish and trout. It was one of those big-blue-sky sunny days in the pre-pandemicera when cares were held at an arm's distance, and Wu-Bower and his father stood shoulder to shoulder on the bow of a boat, casting live shrimp toward the rock jetties off Grand Isle as tail, rolling swells lifted and then dropped the boat with knee-jarring force.

"Keep that slack out of the line, Dad," Wu-Bower admonished. The chef was barefoot, the professor clad in Birkenstocks. It was tough footing on the boat, but still they swung trout over the gunwales, and through it all there was a little dance up on the bow deck, a kind of Cajun two-step as they searched for purchase and balance. And for what would not be the last time over the next few days, it was hard to tell who was leaning into whom.

BACK AT THE FISH CAMP, FATHER AND

sonchop celery, bell pepper, and onion, the holy trinity of Cajun cuisine. Wu-Bower's half brother Greg, a musician and vintage turntable restorer from Durham, North Carolina, referees the conversation. The "Bower boys," as Wu-Bower calls this assemblage of family, have invited me to tag along on one of their occasional pilgrimages to South Louisiana, their ancestral home, to cook, fish, eat, and plumb their old haunts in New Orleans. (Another half brother, Georg, is a Colorado Springsbased pilot whose side gig is restoring vintage Honda motorcycles.)

In the kitchen, the pair work in concert, a discordant strain or two evened out with humor.

"I always take the strings out of my celery," says Bower, slightly stooped and nearly bald, an impish grin tugging at a wiry gray mustache.

Wu-Bower smiles. He knows where this is going. "Those pieces are going to be, like, less than a quarter inch long, Dad."

"The strings are bitter," Bower parries. Wu-Bower's smile widens. "Celery is bitter," he says, triumphant.

"Notifyou take the strings out."

His son taps the tip of a chef's knife on the cutting board, holding his tongue for the moment. "You know, Dad, I'm pretty good at what I do."

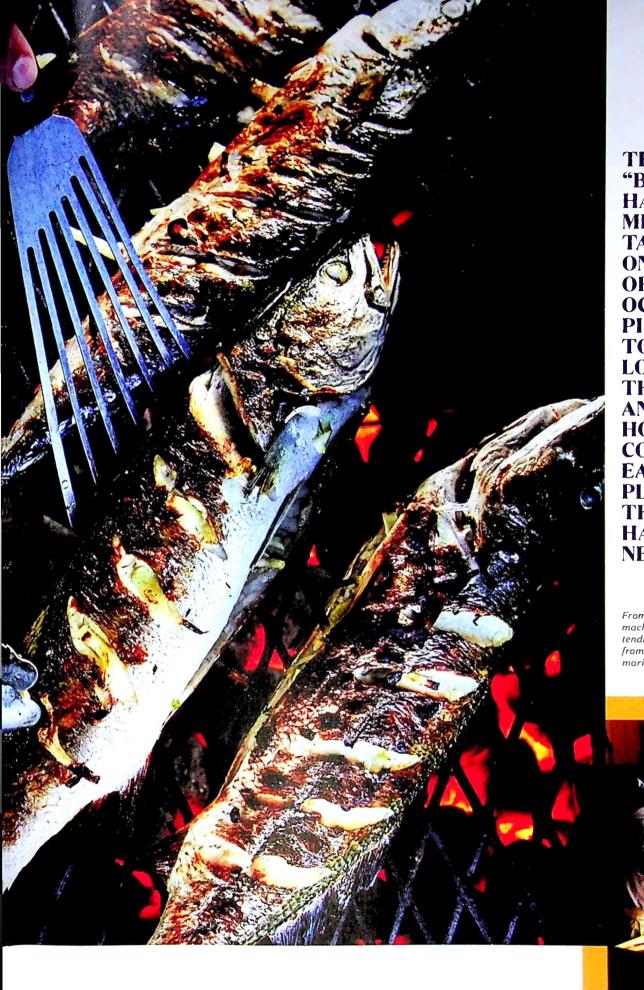
His father relents, but barely. "Look at him," he says. "He cuts vegetables the way I play scales on the piano. I'm very jealous."

There is a brief pause. "But I always take the strings out of my celery."

EXACTLY WHAT ERLING WU-BOWER

does is a topic he's curious about himself, especially as he ponders his immediate future. He left Pacific Standard Time last summer and is working on opening a newrestaurantthat incorporates rooftop-





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PLUMB
THEIR OLD
HAUNTS IN
NEW ORLEANS

From left: Speckled trout and mackerel on the grill; Bower tending the pan. Opposite, from top: Crawfish etouffee; marinating the day's haul.





grown vegetables from Chicago office buildings in an organic space that can shape-shift to include, say, a pottery gallery or a pop-up vintage album kiosk. "I want to take the local concept and make it even smaller," he explains. "I'm more convinced than ever that food isn't about labels. It's about story. And I want to tell my own story through what I do next."

His family story and his culinary expressions are tightly interwoven. He was born in South Bend, Indiana, and moved to Chicago when he was six. His parents divorced, which had at least one fortuitous side effect: As a young child, he traveled extensively with each parent. His mother, Olivia Wu, was a food writer for a suburban Chicago newspaper, the Daily I-lerald, and then the Chicago Sun-Times. As a child, Wu-Bower trolled Vietnamese markets with his mother and was her go-to date on restaurant assignments. (Olivia Wu moved to a similar position at the San Francisco Chronicle before joining Google in 2007 as an executive chef.) All the while, he was trekking with his father back to Louisiana to visit grandparents in Lafayette, and hitching rides across Europe on Bower's frequent research trips.

"Some of my best, earliest memories were of being on a train with Dad, traveling across Europe, eating amazing food," he says. "He would do his research in these grand old libraries while I wandered the nearby streets. It was incredible."

Bower laughs at the story. When his son was only twelve, Bower recalls, "we went to a very nice French restaurant, and Erling told the waiter, 'I'll begin with escargots, and then I want the veal kidneys.' The waiter looked at me with raised eyebrows, and I knew what he was thinking. Is this really what the kid wants? And for the rest of the night, Erling was the center of attention. They brought him anything he ordered."

As the shrimp stock thickens, Wu-Bower considers his cross-cultural mix of personal history, deeply rooted in food. "A lot of the soul of my family is rooted in the South," he says. "Growing up, food was never just food. It was celebrated, analyzed, and discussed at length."

Think about gumbo, he says. It isn't a

thing in and of itself so much as it is an aggregation of other essences. It seems an apt metaphor for his own culinary trajectory, and the vibe of this weekend with his family. "I grew up in an environment where you couldn't separate the cultural aspects of food from the cooking and eating," he says, spooning out a sample for a taste. "That's why I hate recipes. You are, in a sense, stealing someone else's story. And story is where good food begins."

MUSICIS ALSO A CHIEF INGREDIENT

of the Bower boys' trips to Louisiana. From the Port Sulphur marshes, we head north to New Orleans. We headquarter at the Pontchartrain Hotel, the grand 1927 Garden District landmark where Tennessee Williams lived as he wrote A Streetcar Named Desire, then sortie out to some of the family's old haunts.

As undergraduates at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Bower and a small band of music fans pilgrimaged to New Orleans often. "We stayed in cheap motels on the edge of town," he recalls. "We were therefor Al Hirt and Pete Fountain at longgone clubs like Pier 600. I was the Baptist preacher's kid who didn't drink, so I had to do all the driving."

Greg Bower listens with one ear turned to his father and the other cocked toward Bourbon Street, While Wu-Bower's relationship with his father revolves around food, music is the stronger bond for his half brother. "You can't imagine what music would be like without the New Orleans jazz scene," Greg says. "Rock and roll, R&B, soul, funk-it's all intertwined with the jazz, and then you layer in the Cajun music and history, and my dad grew up in the middle of all that. It was the foundation for a stunning career doing things most people have never heard of." He shakes his head. "It all came together for him right here."

Many of Bower's old standby joints are still hopping. At d.b.a., as narrow as a train car and with kaleidoscopic lights playing over old beadboard walls, Walter "Wolfman" Washington is bathed in a green light, playing it all: trombone, saxophone, guitar, bass, drums, and keyboard. We dip in and out of bars, catching snippets of acts, following Bower through the cobbled warrens of the French Quarter.

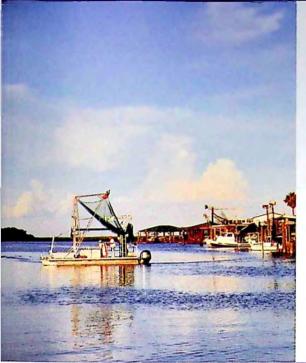
Preservation Hall proves the strongest draw. Even today the venue is hard to miss, a simple wood-shuttered Creole building built on Saint Peter Street in 1817, a year aftera massive fire swept through the French Quarter. Part jazz club, part tourist mecca, and part historic site, it is almost selfconsciously pristine. Inside, the building's original porte cochere serves as a waiting area for ticket holders, musty and dark, with walls covered with old concert posters and vinyl records. In the tiny performance hall, we sit on splintered wood benches only slightly less comfortable than the straightbacked kitchen chairs that support the band players.

Bower remembers firsthand its transformation. He started coming in the late 1950s, when the space was a funky art gallery where the owner invited local jazz musicians to play for tips. It was a fraught moment in New Orleans music history, as traditional jazz was being steamrollered by rock and roll. "There was a movement to find old musicians from the twenties and thirties," Bower recalls, "and convince them to play again." Bower joined a nascent organization called the New Orleans Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz, which organized shows and jam ses-



sions at the art gallery. Crowds spilled into the streets. The venue was renamed Preservation Hallin 1961, and soon music lovers from around the globe packed the place.

The show is exactly what it purports to be-part cover band, part tribute to the arc of jazz history that draws both acolytes and the simply curious. Bower is decidedly in the first group, a little wild-eyed that he's back in town, his fuzz of gray hair backlit by the stage lights, and it's easy to imag-



This page, from top: A commercial fishing boat near Port Sulphur; pompano at Galatoire's; at the Pontchartrain Hotel. Opposite, from top: Greg and Calvin Bower outside Preservation Hall; Wu-Bower and family at Galatoire's.

ine him here as a college kid. As one song winds down, he hollers out a request: "Just a Closer Walk with Thee," the down-tempo Southern Baptist staple.

He catches the confusion crossing my face. "It's a classic New Orleans funeral song," he explains. "At Pier 600. Al Hirt would play it during his third set, and he'd tell people, 'Putyour drinks down now, and be quiet." They'll play it in a Dixieland style. Just listen."

As the soulful, sacred notes reverberate off the walls, everyone in the room is starstruck. And quiet.

Given that our road trip down the culinary and musical lanes of Bower history has been a bit of a French Quarter walk of fame, it's no surprise that we wind up the night at Galatoire's Restaurant. The Bourbon Street fixture, dating back five generations, and the famed Commander's Palace feature as foundational landmarks in Wu-Bower's culinary journey. He has been here many times with his father, and at the table, he sits with his arm around Bower, patting him on the shoulder in a display of easy warmth.

We start the meal with turtle soup topped with sherry, and Bower is immediately transported. "This is New Orleans!" he exclaims, for the tenth time this evening, and every time he means it. But it doesn't take long for his focus to narrow from the memorable surroundings to the tureen

"GROWING UP, FOOD WAS NEVER JUST FOOD. IT WAS CELEBRATED, ANALYZED, AND DISCUSSED AT LENGTH"

on the table.

"There's some kind of thickener in it," he says, mouth half full, spoon in midair. "I can't quite place it."

"It's roux," Wu-Bower says. "It's full of

"No, not roux," his father corrects. "Could be the collagen. I taste it. Or maybe I feel it."

Greg Bower weighs in. "It's the way it pours. I vote for collagen."

Wu-Bower shakes his head, outnumbered. He knows good and well it's roux.

His father senses that perhaps he's pushed a bit hard. He offers a compliment

Galatoire's might offer elevated plates, but it is nonetheless situated in the heart of the Bourbon Street area, a melting pot oftastes, to say the least. Once, Bower was meeting a classics professor from the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill while at a conference of the American Philological Association, when his professor friend walked up to the table.

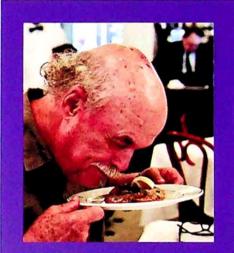
"And she was completely flustered," he says. "She had been horrified by the walk to such a classy restaurant. 'Did you see what I saw just a few doors down?' she asked me. 'Candy underwear!'"

Bower breaks out in uproarious laughter. "Candy underwear! How can you not

love this place!"

Just then, the waiter, a gentleman named Charles Grimaldi who has worked at the iconic restaurant for thirty-five years, places in front of Bower a fillet of pompano, sauted and lightly glazed with butter. The conversation stops as Bower looks at the fish as if he were studying a hymnal, then grasps the plate with both hands, pulls it close, and smells the fish deeply, from one side to the other. A smile breaks across his face. He knows it is the most appropriate response imaginable to the wild-caught fish on his plate.

Beside him, Wu-Bower nods approval. Bring it close. Touch it, smell it, use every sense to harvest the essence. It's not just food, like it's never just music.



by way of apology.

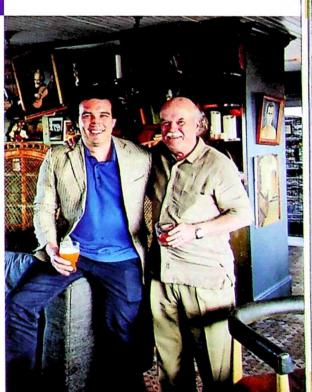
"In his restaurants, everywhere he's ever worked, he's a f**king artist," Bower tells me. "Even his salads, my God, they're wonderful."

"And he's an artist because you dragged him to places like this," Greg offers, "all over the world for half his life."

"True, true," Bower notes. "But with the salads, you know, I'd still say he uses too much vinegar."

The table bursts out laughing. "I'm sorry I make food taste bad, Dad," Wu-Bower says, grinning. His hand never stops rubbing his father's shoulder.

The conversation ricochets between tales about jazz clubs back in the day and unforgettable meals shared the world over. Bower tells the hilarious story of one of his most memorable New Orleans moments.

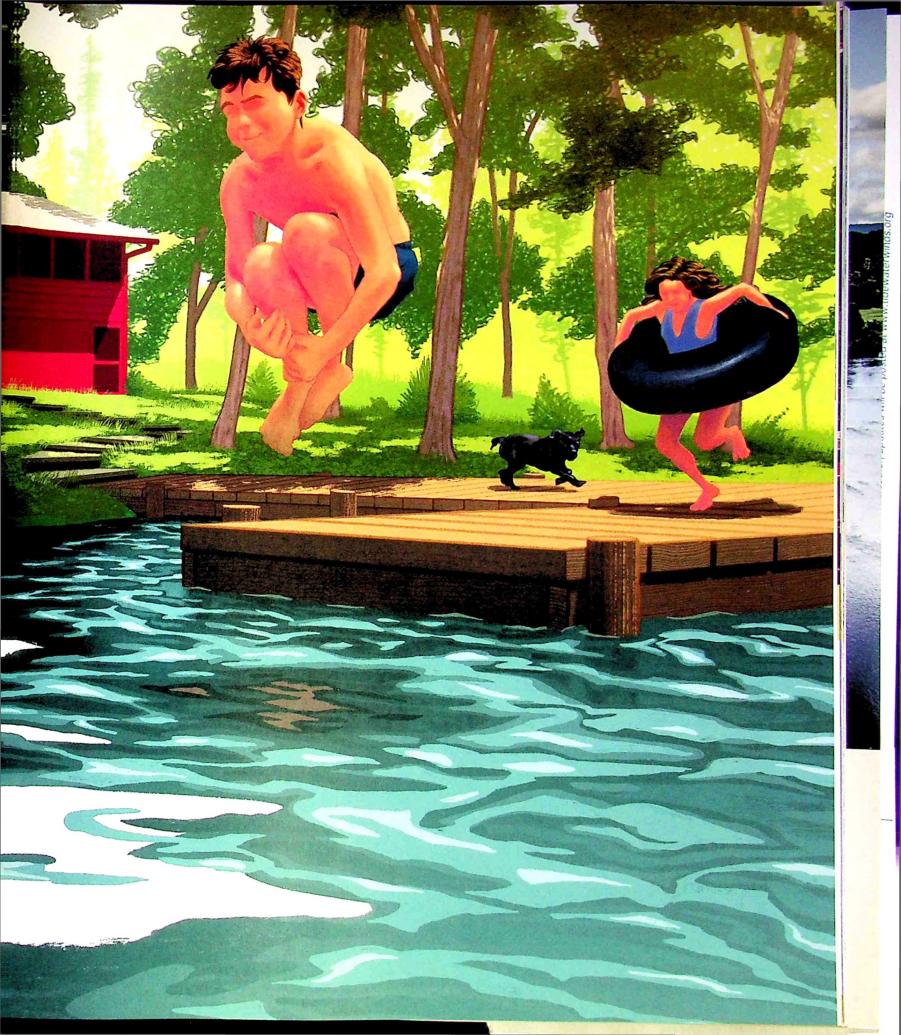


HOUSE REU RIE



ROY BLOUNT JR.
STEPS BACK in TIME to HIS FAMILY'S OLD-SCHOOL
SUMMERS on the WATER

Illustrations by
MICHAEL MARSICANO





THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, MY MOTHER, LOUISE, WOKE UP ABRUPTLY.

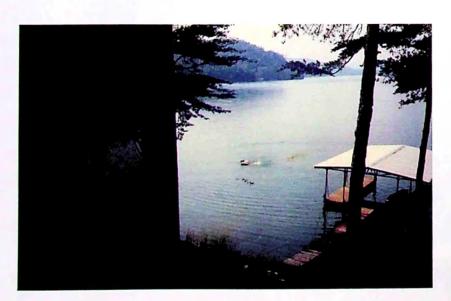
Water was pouring onto her from above. She punched my father. He switched on the light, which was directly above my mother, took one look, and cried, "It's raining in through the light fixture!" This happened one summer half a century ago, in what was then our homemade family cabin on Lake Burton, deep in the woods of the North Georgia mountains.

Closer inspection revealed rain leaking through a hole in the tin roof at another spot, creeping along the ceiling until it got to the light bulb, and then drizzling down. It was one of those things that happened at the lake. Once, our friend Mary Jo's feet caught fire thanks to several jugs of water. Another time, my nephew Stuart woke up his parents to present himself coated with soot from head to toe (he'd been fiddling with a lantern in the night). Lake Burton was still semiwild back then, before weekend McMansions took over its shores. My father, Roy Sr., wanted to grow up to be a home builder, but his carpenter father, having been deprived of all work by the Great Depression, talked him out of it. My father did eventually enable families to build or anyway to own houses, by becoming a prominent savings and loan executive, back when that meant something along the lines of James Stewart in It's a Wonderful Life. And he did build that house on Lake Burton.

Burton is a beautiful lake, created in 1919 by the damming of the Tallulah River for electrical power. The water in undated the town of Burton, which had a post office, two churches, and a population of around two hundred, including the brothers Claud and Fred Derrick, who later played professional baseball. (At one point, Claud roomed with Babe Ruth.) Now more than fifteen hundred summer homes line the banks. I wonder whether any of the city people who take their leisure there ever heard of the Derricks, or have taken time to speculate, as we used to, about what a post office full of fish looks like. The last time I drove up there, our cabin had been torn down and replaced by a suburban-looking structure with a lawn of zoysia.

I was away at college and on summer newspaper jobs during the cabin's construction phase, which must have been hair-raising. Daddy brought in the wooden prefab sections of the cabin's frame by

The view of Lake Burton from the Blounts' porch.



pickup truck over two and a half miles of old logging road that led from the nearest highway. Back then the road was unimproved, a lane and a half at best, clinging tenuously to the sides of old, rounded, but still steep mountains.

"Three chickens," a man up there once remarked to my father, "could eat all the gravel on that road in ten days' time." Along the seven hairpin curves and the intersection with a waterfall, the road had been widened scarcely enough to allow for all four wheels of a modern motor vehicle at once. A little rain—in a county with an annual rainfall among the highest in the nation-would turn this ribbon of red clay into a slalom course relieved only by stumps, bogs, fallen trees, and sometimes a car skidding toward you head-on. You might have to back up half a mile before you found a place where one car could get over by pulling up onto the mountainside or into a creek. Three cars rushing to escape as an incipient gully washer reduced the road to deep muck might encounter another line rushing in to pick up somethingfrom their cabins so they too could rush out.

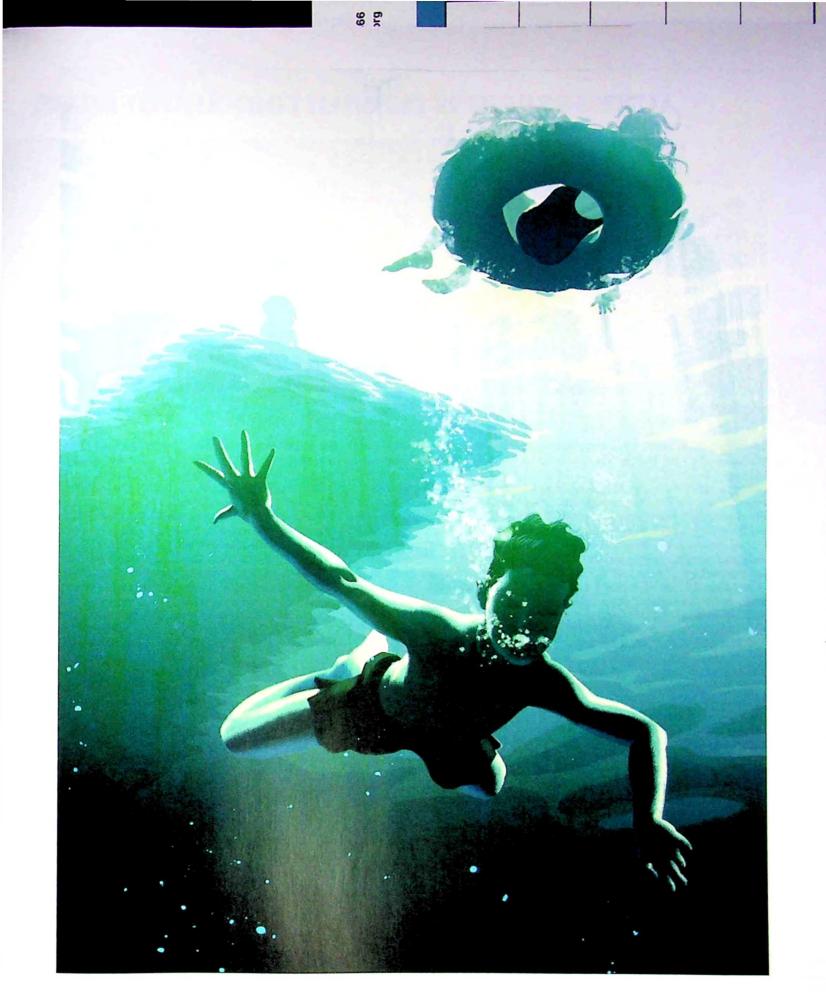
But the road was diverting enough, back then, before you even got off onto the dirt part. Today I-85 goes most of the way from Atlanta to the lake, but in the early years we would travel the hundred-odd miles over streaked, pocked, hilly, aged, and simmering two-lane asphalt, with scrabbly shoulders of dry red dirt and dirty granite gravel, past squashed possums and dogs, bunches of leaning mailboxes, bony women rocking on porches, Womack's Bait and Service Station, mules, tractors, dozens of metal church signs streaked with rust, a Cherokee burial mound, ubiquitous flaps of shed black tire rubber and fan belts, pieces of chrome, old men walking slowly up the road, crooked pine trees, busted watermelons, one of Georgia's last surviving covered bridges, and a sign proclaiming Hoyt G. Head's Deliverance Crusade. Pulling a boat and mo-

tor behind our station wagon, we'd go vwooop, vwooop, vwooop over the tortuous blacktop like a threehundred-pound man who's dreaminghe's a running back, turning end after end after end. Around Gaines ville, the chicken capital of the world, we would start coming upon

trucks carrying stacks and stacks of crates holding live fryers, and almost invariably one fryer would be out of her crate hanging on desperately in the back. We would honk and pass the truck, and my sister, Susan, and I would yell, "You got a chicken loose!" But the driver would never stop to check on one chicken.

From the beginning my mother pointed out that going to the lake was no rest for her. She could not refrain from cooking full-scale meals, or from rigorously cleaning up and making improvements under any roof of her own. Once, before we put in a stove, she cooked steaks on a barbecue grill outside in the rain, keeping them dry with an umbrella.

But she did enjoy looking out over the water at the mountains from our screened porch early in the morning, before the day's outboards had churned up the lake's surface, and hearing the lapping of the water at its edge. The sound that our dock made, pulling with the waves against the cables that moored it to two pine



AUNT JOSEPHINE PITCHED FORWARD OFF THE



trees, reminded her of something comforting from her youth: the creak and slip, snap of a porch swing. "That's something you might capture in your writing." she said.

My mother also enjoyed picking blackberries and huckleberries (which our dog Chipper would eat off the bush), smelling the honeysuckle in season, and visiting a forsaken cemetery nearby with epitaphs like "We had him just a little while."

Once my father, who never got all the way into the water himself, was dutifully pulling some young person on water skis when his favorite cap blew off and sank. Bright green, oddly elongated, and featuring a vintage likeness of Donald Duck, it was a startling topper on an otherwise statesmanlike-looking man, but nothing else kept the sun out of his eyes. I remember watching as he boated back after it a long ways, in the early evening, and my mother, snapping beans on the porch, saying, "Oh, he loved that cap."

The Hickses and the Barneses, who went to our church, also built houses on the lake. Bill Hicks, Chet Barnes, and my father took pleasure in scrounging materials for each other (old telephone poles, oil drums, Styrofoam), insulting each other's craftsmanship—"Well, I don't believe I would have gone about it backwards like that, would you, Chet?"—and joshing about the keeping-upwith-the-Joneses aspect of the pioneer life: "I guess everybody's going to have to break down and put in a commode now that Barnes has."

But none of them were as pointed as Mr. Kastner, a wizened local man with a piercing indirect gaze who subsisted on truck farming, allegedly some distilling, and what carpentry he felt up to. One day, when he was helping Chet and my father with some project, he said, "When you goin' to build a fence?" They assured him they weren't ever. "We have a name," he said, "for city folks that come up here and build fences."

One Saturday when Chet asked him if he could come back and work the next weekend, Mr. Kastner said, "No. I promised to help that other damn fool across the lake next week." He conceded that my father could carpenter, but he told Chet, an insurance executive of some stature, that whoever had the idea that Chet could even take part in building a cabin "sent a boy to do a man's work."

The Kastners had sent all of their children to small Georgia colleges, and they had gone on to take good jobs in states as far away as California. When my father observed that it was sad to see the young folks leave home, Mr. Kastner said, "If

mine didn't leave when they got growed, I'd run 'em off. They wouldn't be no good." He wouldn't join us at meals, saying, "I brought my dinner." When we would stop by his house to negotiate payment, he would come out front and his wife would stay sitting inside out of sight. He'd say, "That'll be \$13.75 for the time and \$4.25 for the paint and nails. Seventeen dollars." She would call out, "Eighteen," from the shadows. Once, we heard, Mrs. Kastner got dressed up and went with her ladies' club on the bus to Atlanta, to shop for the day. She couldn't settle on what to buy with the money she brought, so she came back home with it all. We thought that was touching. The Kastners may have thought we were touching.

The Barneses brought Aunt Josephine and Uncle Lewis, a sister and brother who lived together, to the lake sometimes. Aunt Josephine, elderly, was built like a manatee and hyperactive. One day, though it was her first time to watch anyone water-ski, she was on the dock telling Chet how to teach his daughter Judy how to ski and Judy how to learn.

"J. C.!" she shouted across the water (that being the family name for Chet), "that child's not ever going to learn how to ride that ski if you don't drive that boat slower!" Mary Jo, Chet's wife, said, "Aunt Josephine, he has to drive fast to pull her up."

"Oh," Aunt Josephine said. "Drive faster, J. C.! Faster!"

With that, and body English, she pitched forward off the dock and into the lake. Her flower-print dress billowed out around her like a parachute and she thrashed and hollered, "Help! Lord, *get* me. I can't swim!"

My mother, who couldn't swim either, plunged right in, heedless of her own safety, and found herself standing in fifteen inches of water, grasping at Aunt Josephine's skirts and assuring her that she was coming.

"Aunt Josephine," my mother said after a moment, "you're sitting on the bottom."

"Oh," said Aunt Josephine, and after some heaving and straining by several people, she was up and wading around.



DOCK. "HELP! LORD, GET ME. I CAN'T SWIM!"



From top far left: Roy's sister, Susan (second from left), and Chipper with friends; Roy's son, Kirven, sunbathing on Gracie, the canoe; Roy's daughter, Ennis, messing with Kirven on the dock; Roy waving from the house, with Kirven and cousin Audrey below; Susan slaloming; the kids catching rays; splashing around. Opposite, bottom left: Kirven paddling the canoe.



But most of our family's lake adventures derived not from contrived aquatics but from fundamentalist logistics, transformed by nostalgia and the out-of-doors. At the lake we went back some ways toward the soil, some ways toward nature, but mostly back to old-fashioned, hardscrabble homemaking or home-building choresa sort of ritual reenactment of the down-home hard times my parents and their friends knew, by experience and heritage, in their formative years. At the lake these chores could be recreative.

Uncle Lewis was older, smaller, and quieter than Aunt Josephine. He had vivid white hair and small bright eyes. My mother was painting the porch floor one night when Uncle Lewis came by with his ukulele. He played "Sweet Rosie O'Grady," "Carolina Moon," and "My Wild Irish Rose," and sang them in a high cracked voice, while Mom stayed on her knees singing along politely and brushing on paint.

On the extremely hot day when Mary Jo Barnes caught fire, she and Chet had boated over to the place of a man they knew with a well. They had made arrangements to obtain drinking water from this well regularly, and after filling up a load of glass bottles, they headed back home with them in the bottom of the boat, around Mary Jo's feet. When they reached their dock, she stood up and started handing the bottles out to Chet. She kept saying she smelled something burning, and he kept saying no she didn't. But she insisted, and then she yelled, "It's me!" The sun shining through the water jugs had set her tennis shoes on fire. She had to dunk each of her feet, in turn, over the side.

In 1959, when my father leased our plot from the Corps of Engineers for fifty dollars a year, the woods were full of bears, foxes, and mountain goats. We could often watch a deer or an enormous snake swim from cove to cove as we ate breakfast on our screened porch. A toad would hop out from under the cabin's front stoop whenever we arrived for the weekend. Or else Mother would say, "Well, I wonder where our old toad is?" By 1981, she and Daddy and Chipperwere gone. Susan and I had moved up North. The lake house passed out of the family.

The other day I looked the property up on Google Earth. Where our cabin had been looks like a defense compound. Is that round thing a helipad? A covered swimming pool? At least a patio. A patio! Lots of podlike dark-green roofs. I'll bet acorns don't bounce off of those the way they did off our tin one. Good thing my kids and their cousins had a chance to be under that roof.

I guess we had a part in denaturing the area around the man-made lake. But our encroachments were modest. One fall afternoon, Susan and Mother and I drove up without Daddy for some reason. We towed the boat, which was packed with supplies including a whole ham, fresh out of the oven. On one of the single-lane switchback roads, we looked out the window and the boat was alongside of us. The trailer hitch had come off. We wrangled the trailer back and hooked it up temporarily. Found a gas station with a guy available for welding. But then, when we got to the boat ramp we used, something was wrong with our old fifteen-horse Johnson motor. I got it cranked, but it just barely put-putted.

We were miles from our cabin. It was turning cold. And more important, dark. But Susan is a born navigator.

"We turn at the school bus," she said.

"School bus? What school bus?" I asked.

"There's a school bus," she said.

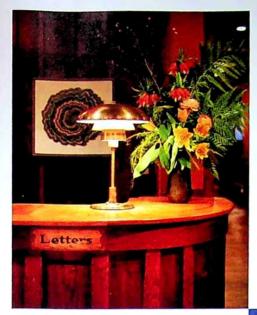
Very few lights lit the shore, and no moon to speak of either. We poked along on the lake for three spooky hours. Couldn't even see each other, except fleetingly with our single, carefully conserved flashlight. I worried that Chipper, who was old by then and had no use at all for cold weather, would lose patience, but she was as oddly calm as the rest of us.

There was the school bus. Somebody had turned it into a cabin. Around midnight, we reached our dock. I remember that ride as one of our least stressful family times together. Chipper had kept warm, we discovered, by sleeping on the ham.

Another dark night, when most of the lakeside lots were still uncleared. Mother and Susan and I got lost on a walk. We came upon a house. We knew we didn't know the people there, but the outlines looked familiar, so we crept up close in hopes of getting our bearings. Suddenly the residents switched on a row of preposterously brilliant outdoor lights and confronted us, stooped in surreptitious poses. We ran off into the woods, delighted, feeling almost like indigenous fauna.

GOWHERE THE ROAD TAKES YOU. AND THEN SOME.





TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE FOR THE SOUTHERN SOUL

From left, top to bottom: The High Hampton inn's front desk; trout with benne seeds from the Dining Room; the Lake Cottage; chefs Zach Chancey and April and Scott Franqueza; mountain-air-loving dahlias; each guest room features its own art.

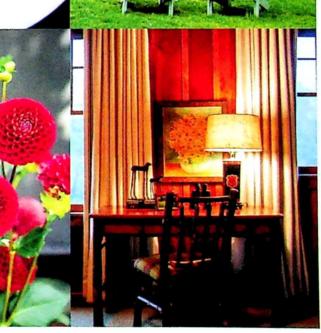
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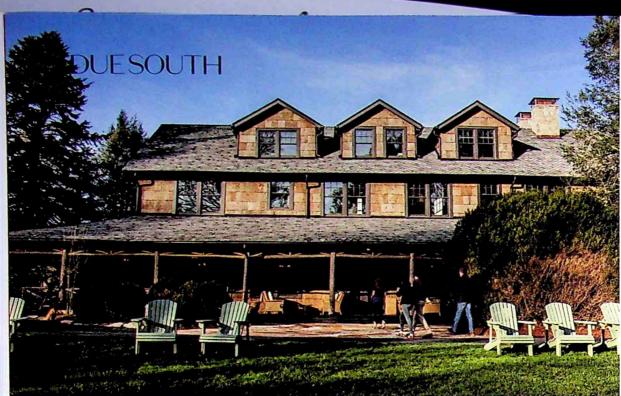
High Hampton's Next Act

THE BLACKBERRY FARM TEAM HELPS USHER IN THE NEXT CHAPTER OF A FABLED NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN RETREAT

By Elizabeth Hutchison Hicklin









"High Hampton was cherished by the McKee family for so long that we all really want to do what's right for the property"



or generations, much of High Hampton's summer-camp charm stemmed from the resort seeming impervious to change. The getaway served as a time capsule in the heart of the Blue Ridge in Cashiers, North Carolina, where days consisted of morning waterfall hikes and lazy afternoons spent fishing and swimming in the property's fifteen-acre lake, ringed in banks of pale pink mountain laurel. Evenings hummed with Scrabble tournaments and bingo. It was a place where guests still dressed for dinner, and air-conditioning amounted to a few windows thrown open to catch mountain breezes. Wi-Fi, when it was introduced, was spotty at best, and until six years ago, guests could only make reservations by telephone.

In the late 1800s, Caroline Hampton Halsted and her husband, William Stewart Halsted, one of the founding surgeons at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, purchased the then 450-acre Western North Carolina property and its historic hunting lodge from her aunts, naming it High Hampton. A North Carolina couple, E.L. McKee and his wife, Gertrude, converted it to an inn in the early 1920s, and for nearly a century the McKee family welcomed vacationers seeking relaxation and refuge from the South's sweltering summers. Today the unique resort and club, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, sits on more than 1,400 pristine acres of Appalachian countryside near the Nantahala National Forest.

Change finally caught up with High Hampton in 2017, when a trio of family-run Southern companies, all with ties to the area, purchased the retro resort and its aging $inn.\,But\,not\,too\,much\,change.\,They sought\,to\,preserve$ the spirit of the place while making thoughtful updates that would ensure another hundred years of memories. One of its new owners, Sandy Beall, a cofounder of Tennessee's Blackberry Farm and Blackberry Mountain, first visited the storied property with his family in 1982. He had tried to buy the inn once before, but the McKee descendants declined and instead charmed him into purchasing a private home in one of the resort's residential communities. Beall and the Blackberry team brought their decades of hospitality expertise to the revamped inn and its two restaurants, which began welcoming guests again this spring after nearly three years of renovations.

"High Hampton was cherished by the McKee family for so long that we all really want to do what's right for the property," says Scott Greene, the inn's new general manager. "There are parts that simply can't be reproduced." Plenty will look familiar to longtime visitors. Though weather damage forced a redo of the inn's shagbark siding, only the keenest eye would notice the switch from chestnut to poplar. Inside. the American chestnut walls and ceilings. the color of bourbon, remain unchanged, as does the lobby's massive four-sided stone fireplace. One significant addition: central heating and air, which will allow the resort to stay open year-round for the first time in its nearly hundred-year history.

Working closely with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, the Blackberry Farm Design team updated and

enlarged the twelve guest rooms in the main inn and the forty-seven others in the surrounding cottages. They kept much of the original furniture, a mix of antiques and vintage pieces, refurbishing it with fresh paint or new upholstery. Colorful textiles, contemporary lighting, and artwork rooted in history-framed pages from High Hampton's original guest book, for



From top: The inn sits on more than 1,400 acres; pizza with North Carolina's Lady Edison ham; beverage manager Kelsey Hofmann.



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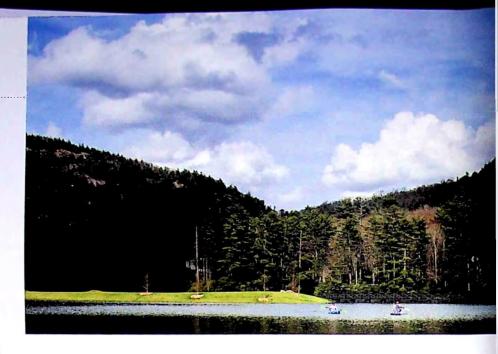
Look Forward, Travel Back

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Maples, sourwoods, yellow poplars, and rare red spruces shade the inn's fifteen miles of hiking trails, which come summer are shot through with bright pink ribbons of blooming rhododendron





example—now line the hallways, which still evoke a beloved family home. Returning guests might recognize the resort's old wooden dining chairs repurposed as catchalls for towels and toiletries in the bathrooms, and the third floor's odd-shaped angular doors as funky new coffee tables. They'll also be happy to note that the rooms remain television-free.

At the back of the inn, High Hampton's two restaurants expanded the outdoor dining spaces to take better advantage of the views of Hampton Lake and Rock Mountain, which turns a brilliant rose gold as the sun sets. Open for lunch, snacks, and cocktails (including Bloody Marys on Sundays), the Tavern is laid-back, serving elevated comfort food like Providence Farm beef tartare with black pepper potato chips. The upstairs Dining Room no longer requires coat and tie, but jackets are recommended for dinner. Instead of the long-running buffet, a talented pair of Blackberry alums—executive p.m. chef Scott Franqueza and his wife, pastry chef April Franqueza—now oversee an å la carte Blue Ridge—inspired menu, relying on a network of local purveyors for dishes such as benne-crusted trout.

Beyond the inn, life at High Hampton remains centered around the outdoors. July through early fall, colorful blooms the size of your hand brighten up the

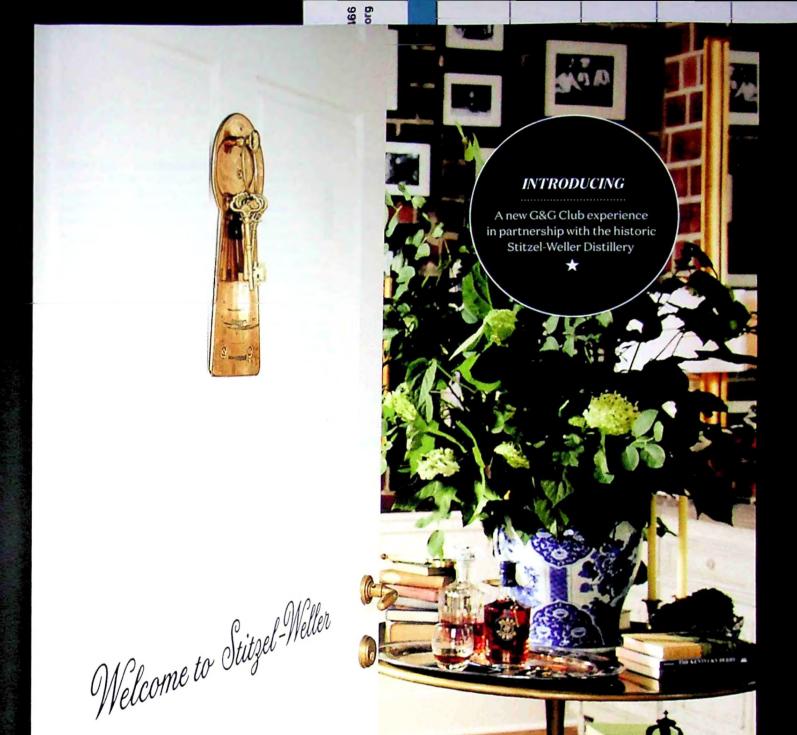
heirloom Dahlia Garden, where gardener Drew English tends some six hundred of the mountain-air-loving plants. The towering ginkgo, bottlebrush, bald cypress, copper beech, and Fraser fir trees planted by Dr. Halsted and later Gertrude McKee still greet visitors along the main drive and manicured front lawn. Maples, sourwoods, yellow poplars, and rare red spruces shade High Hampton's fifteen miles of hiking trails, which include challenging routes to the summits of Rock Mountain and Chimneytop and come summer are shot through with bright pink ribbons of blooming rhododendron.

Across the lawn, toward the remodeled club, you'll find tennis, pickleball, and croquet courts as well as a new Tom Fazio-designed golf course, which recently opened to club members and inn guests. "[Fazio] fell in love with the area when he built the Wade Hampton course in 1987," says Tony Snoey, the club's general manager. "He said he'd been designing this course in his head for thirty years." And while there's no need to venture off property for a hike, High Hampton makes a fine base camp for exploring farther afield, like the short trek to the postcard-worthy swimming hole at Silver Run Falls. The inn is also minutes from some of the best fly fishing in the country, and the concierge can set you up with a guide from Brookings Anglers.

Doing absolutely nothing is also fully endorsed. Exhibit A: the six-room spa carved out of the inn's third floor, with gabled natural wood walls, or the new lakeside pool. Scott Greene admits that the laziest days at High Hampton are often the most memorable-even the rainy ones. (Cashiers lies in the middle of a temperate rain forest and gets upwards of eighty inches per year.) Instead of spoiling the day, afternoon showers force an even slower pace. The porches fill up and out come the board games, decks of cards, puzzles, and books. A nap might also be in order—there's no better way to doze off than to the sounds of an Appalachian rainstorm. "Slowing down and just being together, taking a moment with extended family and friends," Greenesays, "that's something we all need a little more of right now." @

Left to right, from top: Enjoying an afternoon on the lake; a guest bath at the inn; an old hotel register framed in the hallway; a renovated room.





GARDEN & GUN CLUB

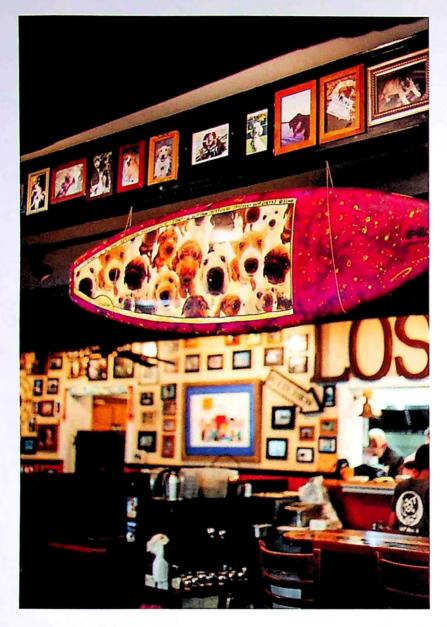
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OUR KIND OF PLACE

Breakfast with the Dogs

A LOVE LETTER TO THE QUINTESSENTIAL BEACH-TOWN HANGOUT

By Mike Grudowski

never head to the Lost Dog Cafe for breakfast unless it's a special occasion: a visit from out-oftown family, say; or the week of our anniversary; or a Thursday. I'm not particular about it. (I might go there to celebrate when I finish writing this.) Part of my excitement, I guess, comes from being an expat Midwesterner transplanted to the coast near Folly Beach, South Carolina, just south of Charleston: Breakfast! On the beach! Part is the expectation that once I'm fed and caffeinated, adventure may follow: a boat ride with friends, or a beach walk looking for dolphins. Part of it is sentimental: My wife and I stumbled onto the place one morning nearly fifteen years ago, on a weekend swing through that scruffy barrier island before catching a flight home to California, never imagining that a couple of years later we'd end up living fifteen minutes away, at least on light-traffic days, which in summer time Charleston are about as common as snowmen.

The food, of course, is a big draw too—the reason my ears prick up, as it were, whenever someone mentions Lost Dog, and the reason you can expect to wait for a table. But not because the menu is heavy on innovation or surprises. It isn't, although the kitchen turns out tasty breakfasts and lunches with the consistency of a Swiss factory. The restaurant doesn't really trumpet farm-to-fork credentials or jump on bandwagons; no avocadotoast or acai bowls here. Lost Dog serves what I'd call surf-bum comfort food—biscuits and gravy, muffins and bagels, Thai wraps and sandwiches on croissants, the sort of unfussy homestyle temptations that have sold millions of Barefoot Contessa cookbooks.

Although the servers are always hustling, no one seems rushed. Bloody Marys and mimosas come in masonjars, and breakfast might arrive on mismatched Fiestaware. There are touches both Southern—shrimp and grits, a BLT with fried green tomatoes and pimento cheese—and Southwestern: huevos rancheros, green chile on the cheddar burger. We tend to splurge on the Folly Benedict, with a crab cake and a shrimp cake beneath the customary poached eggs and hollandaise, at seventeen bucks the most expensive thing on the menu. We don't leave hungry.

With its L-shaped counter and shaded pet-friendly patio, Lost Dog feels like it's been around forever. But it actually opened in 2002, born of a series of serendipitous events. Its owner, an Ohio native named Carol Kruer, had relocated with her then husband two years earlier from the ski town of Breckenridge, Colorado, to be closer to family. While living among Folly Beach's mix of grand waterfront houses and weathered cottages and managing a restaurant in Charleston, she came across a "yard sale" by the owner of a breakfast joint on Center Street, Folly's six-block-long commercial strip, who was vacating her lease. Kruer and her husband made a bid for the space, although "I didn't think we had a shot in hell," she recalled recently, sipping a Coors Light at a sunny picnic table off the patio. Of course, they got it.

They had no real business plan, though-"We were just running by the skin of our pants" is how Kruer puts it-or even a clue what to call their new enterprise. "Everything out here on the beach at that time was the Seashell, the Lighthouse, the Sand Dollar." Backthen, Folly allowed unleashed dogs along the shore, and one day Hocus, Kruer's aptly named golden retrieverspringer spaniel mix, disappeared. Hocus soon resurfaced, but only after inspiring both a name and a clever merchandising theme. With little budget for decorating, Kruer invited employees and guests to bring in pictures of their dogs. Four years later, she bought a drab gray Laundromat around the corner on West Huron Avenue, sold the washers and dryers for scrap, put in a kitchen, and moved all the snapshots. To this day, framed photos of dogs of every size, creed, and color fill the cinder-block walls, complementing the dog-motif surfboard hung from the ceiling.

"I always tell everybody," Kruer says, "years from now, when they uncover the Lost Dog, they'll be like, 'It was a shrine to dogs!" A local artist drew the logo, a jovial cartoon pooch with a paw raised to its brow. That's Hocus searching for her misplaced master: the face that launched a thousand T-shirts. Having survived storm surges, power outages, recessions, and COVID shutdowns, the place appears to be a gold

mine, but Kruer adamantly turns down any offers to buy or franchise it. "I like knowing my staff," she explains, "and being here."

The visit we remember most happened a few years ago, after a wretched October morning that began with a trip to the vet and ended with our having to say goodbye to a beloved pet of our own, after almost fifteen years. (Technically, Huck was a cat, but he acknowledged no distinction between himself and dogs, or humans for

that matter.) After we'd laid him to rest by the garden fence and dried our eyes, we realized we were famished, and we knew where we needed to go. As we sat on Lost Dog's patio waiting for our food, a black Lab at a nearby table kept staring at us, and before long, after we waved off the owners' apologies, he tiptoed over, forcing his transmission-sized head under our hands so we'd pet him. We had zero doubt that pup sensed something—that he somehow knew something had been torn, and needed mending. On that day, for two slightly lost humans, that Lab was the very soul of empathy.

Does the Lost Dog deserve credit for that moment? You can decide. But the restaurant did welcome the dog onto the patio, and it welcomed us back for lunch, and, as usual, everybody got exactly what they needed.



From far left: Pup photos cover the walls and a surfboard at the Lost Dog Cafe in Folly Beach, South Carolina; Fynn, another satisfied customer.

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SPORTING

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The North Fork River and its better-known sister stream of the Ozarks, the White River, are famous for some of the fastest trout action in the South, especially in the summer, when the tailwaters below dams keep the water cool. It's not uncommon to land fifty fish a day-or as many as one hundred-from the rivers' heavily stocked waters near the town of Norfork. But these streams also hold a solid promise of landing a rare four-species

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SOUTHERN AGENDA

Grand Slam of trout-a brown, brook, rainbow, and cutthroat trout in a single day. "A lot of people come to these rivers for boatloads of rainbows and the biggest brown trout in the world," says Brian Wise, an Ozarks guide with a massive cult following. "But the Grand Slam is definitely a thing, and people can go a little crazy over it." Wading anglers have a good crack at a brag-worthy fish story during low-water periods. But when power generation is on and river levels are up, Wise suggests fishing with a guide from one of the region's signature twenty-foot-long White River-style jon boats, drifting egg patterns, San Juan worms, and tiny marabou jigs. Sometimes, he says, it's quick and easy. He's had a clientland a Grand Slam in two hours. Other times, well, it's fishing. "You'll typically get a brown, rainbow, and cutthroat no problem," he says. "Then the hunt is on for the brookie. With three in the boat, folks tend to put their heads down and fish hard."

- agfc.com
- riveroflifefarm.com

FOOD

Alabama

SWEET HOME ALA-BURGER

Ever since Milo Carlton finished his tenure as an army cook in World War II and returned home to open Milo's Hamburgers in North Birmingham in 1946, he and his



successors have served hot griddled hamburgers (each augmented with a hidden baby patty dubbed the Little Something Extra) daubed in smoky secret sauce-a recipe kept under wraps for three quarters of acentury. "At its base it's a tomato paste, and there's chili powder in it that hits the nose," says Tom Dekle, the current owner of Milo's, which celebrates its seventyfifth anniversary this year. As a child in the 1970s, Dekle waited in long lines to order sacks of burgers with his father at the original Milo's walk-up window. Nostalgia undoubtedly plays a role in the restaurant's growth (with twenty-two Alabama locations and counting). "But we're also celebrating innovations," Dekle says. In honor of the semises quicentennial, a new dish debutsthis summer: chicken nuggets served with that indelible sauce.

miloshamburgers.com

CONSERVATION

Florida

SWOON FOR SWALLOW TAILS

"This is a charismatic butterfly that acts like a hummingbird," says Jaret Daniels, the curator at the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity at the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville. "It can fly backward, and it's beautiful to watch." The Schaus' Swallowtail, dark with bright yellow markings, is one of North America's most endangered butterflies-in 2012, a population survey of its hardwood hammock habitat on the coral islands of Key Largo and Biscayne National Park turned up just four adult individuals. Now there are more than five hundred, thanks in part to Daniels's breeding and reintroduction program. This spring and summer, Daniels and his team will again brave the butterfly's habitat ("it's hot, it's dense, it's dark, and hundreds of thousands of salt marsh mosquitoes are trying to get at your flesh") to release both adults and caterpillars where they hope the butterfly can establish a new population in Lignumvitae Key Botanical State Park. "We place each caterpillar individually on the host plant (torchwood), making sure it gets a foothold," Daniels says. To see a

Schaus' Swallowtail as a caterpillar, a pupa, or sometimes even in flight, visit the McGuire Center at the museum, where glass windows look onto what Daniels calls "butterfly conservation in real time."

floridamuseum.ufl.edu



ART

Georgia

FRAMES OF MIND

Underexposed: Women Photographers from the Collection at Atlanta's High Museum of Art (through August 1) is "a romp through photo history through a newlens," says photography curator Sarah Kennel. Beginning with Anna Atkins's plant cyanotypes, widely considered to be some of the first works by a female photographer, the exhibition runs roughly chronologically, dipping into thematic groupings. Atlanta photographer Sheila Pree Bright, for instance, examines domestic spaces in the homes of Black Atlantans in her Suburbia series with close-ups of a closet, a toyspeckled staircase, and child-sized Air Jordans on a bedspread. Nan Goldin's portrayal of actress Cookie Mueller and her lover postured pensively in bed shows some of the ways women see one another. A statement accompanies each piece, introducing the person behind the camera. "We want to pull out stories to give the full picture of who these artists are," Kennel explains. "I hope visitors discover photographers they didn't know before."

■ high.org

DRINKS

Kentucky

COP THIS POP

"The original recipe calls for small-scale measurements of drops and drams," says Fielding Rogers of the ginger-citrus soda Ale-8-One. That's all that Rogers. the fourth-generation owner of the Winchester, Kentucky-based company, will say about his family's handwritten secrets. The company, now a bona fide Bluegrass State icon, celebrates its ninety-fifth anniversary on July 13. In 1926, Rogers's greatgreat-uncle George Lee Wainscott sold his first bottles at the Clark County Fair and held a contest to give the soda its name. The winner was A Late One, 1920s slang for "the latest thing," which evolved into Ale-8-One. This year, to commemorate the milestone, Rogers will crack open a glass bottle and make a float: "Our seasonal Orange Cream Ale-8 over vanilla ice cream is my favorite," he says, "although the Cherry Ale-8 and vanilla ice cream is a close second." For an adult version, Rogers recommends blending a Kentucky Slushy-frozen Ale-8-One with bourbon-or ordering one at Belle's Cocktail House in Lexington. ■ ale8one.com

ART

Louisiana

FIBER OF BEING

"As soon as an Acadian woman had a daughter, she would start on her trousseau," says the textile conservator and filmmaker Sharon Gordon Donnan. It could take a mother years to weave the twelve blankets, twelve bedspreads, six sheets, twelve towels, four mattress covers, several pillows, and one quilt that made up the traditional marriage dowry in 1700s and 1800s Louisiana. Although it's rare to find one of these textiles in an antique shop today-families in rural Louisiana treasure their heirlooms-you'll find a collection at Acadian Brown Cotton: The Fabric of Acadiana, an exhibition at the Hilliard Art Museum in Lafayette (through June 30



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SOUTHERN AGENDA

and viewable online), and in the documentary film Coton jaune. At the heart of the Acadian weaving tradition is an unusual variety of caramel-hued cotton long grown only in Peru, Mexico, and, likely because of trade routes, rural southwestern Louisiana. These days, you're unlikely to meet a family that still grows brown cotton, spins it into yarn, and weaves it into blankets, but Donnan believes in the quiet power of handmade goods. "More and more people are coming forward and wanting to weave as a craft," she says. "We're even working with fifteen farmers who now want to grow brown cotton-and touch a bit of their ancestors' experience."

acadianbrowncotton.com

CONSERVATION

Maryland

RIVER WALK

The former Maryland state senator Bernie Fowler remembers when soft-shell crabs from the Patuxent River, a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay, sold for a cent apiece; he also remembers the water being so clear he could see shrimp on the bottom when he was in up to his shoulders. "That river was good to me and my family, and gracious enough to feed a lot of hungry tummies in the Great Depression," he says; now ninetyseven years old, Fowler has spent most of his life in public service trying to restore the river's health. On the second Sunday in June at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum in St. Leonard, he will perform the thirty-fourth annual Patuxent River Wade-In, donning his signature overalls, cowboy hat with a jaunty American flag, and white tennis shoes. His "sneaker index" is an unofficial measure of the river's cleanliness through its inches of visibility, conducted alongside supporters of the cause including Steny Hoyer, the current representative for Maryland's fifth congressional district (and the Flouse majority leader). "Each year I'm proud to join Bernie Fowler," Hoyer says. "He has dedicated his life to fighting for a cleaner Chesapeake Bay and watershed, and everyone in Southern Maryland knows about his white sneakers." In the 1960s, Fowler measured fifty-seven inches before he lost sight of his



Setting the Table

Noteworthy restaurants opening in the South

By Caroline Sanders

Dauphine's

Washington, D.C. The lauded New Orleans chef Kristen Essig moved from Magazine Street to the nation's capital, where she employs mid-Atlantio ingredients to make Louisiana classics, including duck jambalaya and soafood gumbo. Riffs on a St Charles Punch and Roffignac come courtesy of the James Beard Award-winningbarman Neal Bodenheimer.

Diner Bar and the Grev Market

Austin, TX This summer, Savannah restaurateurs Mashama Bailey and John O. Morisano will launch two spots in Austin's Thompson hotel. Diner Bar mixes coastal

Southern fare with Lone Star traditions to serve dishes like chanterelle and summer corn and pork belly country pasta, while the counter-style Grey Market will dishout lunches and grab-and-go house-made pickles and jams.

EG+MC

Nashville, TN Nearly a century ago, Jefferson Street marked the epicenter of Black enterprise in Nashville. This past spring, the owners of the local chain Slim & Husky's Pizza Beeria teamed up with Apertif bar's Gemaal Pratts to help reignite that legacy. Live music plays on the wraparound patio, and chef Jason Williams serves Southern tapas including shrimp-and-grits fritters.

Pink Bellies

Charleston, SC After stints running a food truck and a food-hall stall, chef Thai Phi opened a permanent iteration of Pink Bellies on King Street, serving classic and reimagined Vietnamese comfort foods such as beef pho dumplings and pulled-pork-topped garlic noodles.

Supperland

Charlotte, NC Inside a restored middentury church, the steakhouse Supperland takes inspiration from Sunday covered-dishluncheons and dials them up a notch. Wagyu beef pot roast resets the standard, and ambrosia cranks to eleven with brandied cherries and charred pineapple



SOUTHERN AGENDA

shoes—a number not seen since: last year he tallied forty-three inches. "You never give up hope, but we have a long way to go," Fowler says. "I know that a clean Chesapeake is the heart of Maryland."

jefpat.maryland.gov



CONSERVATION

Mississippi

CROAK OF INSPIRATION

Bringing the dusky gopher frog, found only at a handful of ponds among the pines of De Soto National Forest in the southernmost counties of Mississippi, back from the edge of extinction is no simple task. As part of a breeding program at the Dallas Zoo funded in part by the National Geographic Society, scientists use ultrasound, pipettes, and petri dishes for frog in vitro fertilization that results in hundreds of tadpoles specially raised for release in Mississippi. "It's a lot of work," admits Dallas Zoo herpetologist Amber Faasen, "but it's worth it when you see them hop off onto the pond banks." In midsummer, the zoo aims to pack up the young froglets and drive them to Mississippi for the big day, alongside partner zoos with their own amphibious cargo. Once in their new homes, thousands of gangly amphibians will use the hot summer months to "grow into big beefy froglets" that can survive the winter in gopher tortoise burrows, and hopefully start reproducing naturally, sans IVF. "We started breeding three years ago, and now we've started hearing males callingthey sound like a really old, creaky door," Faasen says. "That means they've survived the winters and feel comfortable enough in their habitat to be calling to the females." Their other standout trait is plain adorable: When frightened, the frogs have been

known to hunker down and cover their faces with their front feet.

dallaszoo.com

MUSIC

North Carolina

DOC IN THE HOUSE

The Blue Ridge Mountains were a haven for folk musicians and banjo makers long before Doc Watson came up in the early 1960s. But the flat-picking Deep Gap, North Carolina, native, who died in 2012, elevated those sounds to the international stage. "He had this immense talent that brought traditions from before him to the contemporary era, then took them to the next level with innovation," says Mark Freed, the cultural resources director of Boone, North Carolina, which has celebrated Doc Watson Day on the third Friday of June since 2011. "He was very much like other mountain people, using the resources available and creating something entirely new." This year's festivities on June 18 will feature musical performances livestreamed from Boone's Appalachian Theatre and recorded well wishes from Doc disciples far and wide. Mini music lessons and workshops the week beforehand also honor Watson's memory.

joneshouse.org

FOOD

Oklahoma

HUCKLEBERRY WIN

"Now, I'm a little opinionated, but I'd say a huckleberry is both sweeter and more tart than a blueberry," says Johnnie Earp of Jay, Oklahoma - a town of 2,500 people in the Ozark foothills that proclaims itself the huckleberry capital of the world. Late May through June, residents take to steep slopes in the woods to forage for the petite ink-colored berries (several varieties grow in the country, and eastern Oklahoma near the Arkansas border is home to the black huckleberry). "Picking a gallon of huckleberries is a challenge; they grow



How to Find Shark Teeth

Southern creeks and coastlines teem with fossilized chompers

Call in the Pros

In South Carolina, fossil-hunting guide Cade Kaufmann of Charleston Outdoor Adventures leads groups on walking tours along beaches to find fossilized shark teeth that are millions of years old. "It took me years to find my first large tooth in a mineral deposit," Kaufmann says. That research pays off for his guests. "By hiring a guide, you're taking out a lot of the time and guesswork."

Get a Little Lost

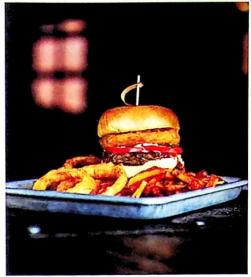
Kaufmann studies fossil formations on the United States Geological Survey website, which shares maps and tips, and then he seeks areas that aren't popular with crowds. "Hook for the most overgrown creek I can find, or a little shaded beach off the beaten path, or, in my kayak, inlets that a motorboat can't get to. He also researches spots where ancient sand and silt were recently dredged up-especially the port cities of Charleston, Savannah, and Jacksonville, Florida.

Seek the Sheen

Fossilized shark teeth absorb surrounding minerals, meaning their white color turns gray, brown, or reddish. Look for triangular shapes and a special glimmer. "There's a certain sheen on tooth enamel." Kaufmann says. "If the tooth is submerged in sand, you might have a small amount of enamel reflecting up at you. That reflectivity is something you won't get from shells or anything else."-CJ Lotz











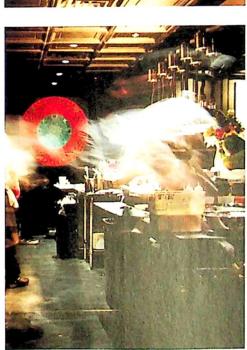


estled one block off the Great Smoky Mountains Parkway,

pick up a Historic Walking Tour brochure and cross over to Bruce Street to see art installations honoring Sevierville's historic railway as well as murals that celebrate the city's past. Grab an artisan burger piled high with southern flavors at Graze or make a dinner reservation at The Appalachian where Chef David Rule prepares traditional hearth cooked Appalachian dishes with a modern twist.

Find treasures in downtown stores. D Garden's home décor and gifts fill antique wooden drawers and shelves that held penny nails and handsaws nearly 100 years ago when the building was home to Sevierville Hardware. Further down the road, expert jeweler Ronel Raicsics toils away at his bespoke jewelry store producing custom heirloom-quality pieces in fine gold and gems. Across the street, The Cherry Pit Quilt Shop produces its own type of heirlooms - beautiful quilts, rich fabrics, intricate patterns, and classes designed to keep the craft of quilting alive.

Old & New









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SOUTHERN AGENDA

out there where the ticks and chiggers and snakes are," says Beverly Jones, who along with Earp helps coordinate Jay's annual Huckleberry Festival over the Fourth of July weekend. But the labor is worth it-in summertime, the town is awash with huckleberry pies, cobblers, pancakes, and lemonade; the local Sonic even puts out a huckleberry shake. This year, Earp and Jones plan to go ahead with the fifty-fourth annual festival, which features free ice cream topped with huckleberries for all, a turtle derby, a rodeo, a car show, fireworks shot from traditional two-person gigging boats on nearby Lake Eucha, and a high-profile, high-stakes huckleberry pie contest and auction. "The Cherokee are part of our community, and usually the chief will come bid on a pie," Earp says. "We've seen some of the first-place winning pies go for over fifteen hundred dollars.'

■ jaychamber.org



SPORTING

South Carolina

OUTSTANDING IN THE FIELD

"After the safety talk, I keep it really simple," says Elizabeth Lanier Fennell of her style of shotgun instruction, which quickly moves students from target practice at the range to a clays course that meanders through the pines at the Kiawah Island Sporting Club not far from Charleston. One of only four female National Sporting Clays Association Level III instructors in the country (not only is she a crack shot herself who has traveled to Scotland for traditional driven shoots and Argentina and Bolivia for dove hunts, she's also certified to coach even the most advanced

wing-shooting competitors), Fennell has a hard-earned knack for helping women feel comfortable in shooting sports. "First, we follow the target with our hands," she says. "Then we follow it with the empty gun, so they get the feeling of the movement before they pull the trigger. They relax, and when they fire, they're surprisedfun and comfort breed success." Kiawah saw a 30 percent increase in visitors to its clays course and skeet-shooting range last year, and a lesson with Fennell is one of the few ways the general public can access the property. "As families found themselves looking for outdoor activities, they came out to try shooting," Fennell says. "Many who came to 'watch' found themselves not only trying it but loving it."

- kiawahisland.com
- fennellshootingschool.com

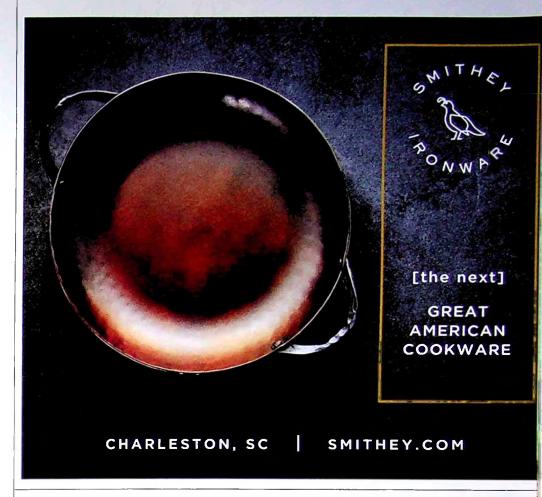
OUTDOORS

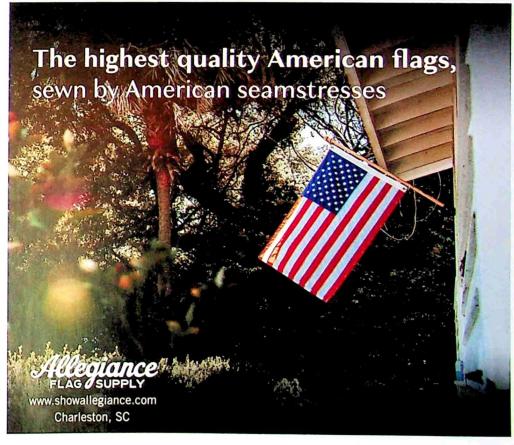
Tennessee

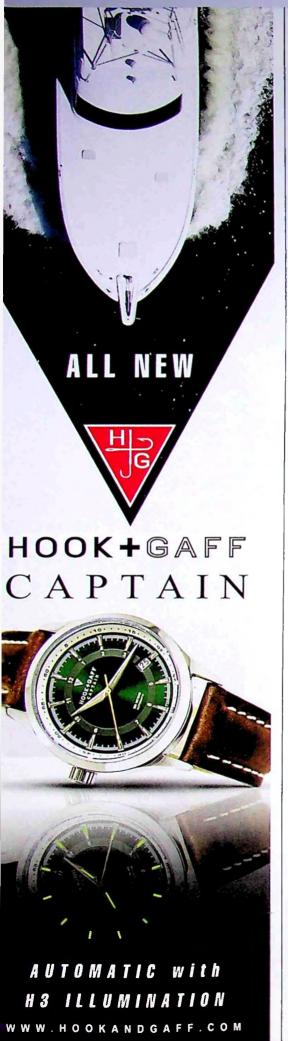
NATURALIST INSTINCTS

Ila Hatter, a staff instructor at the Smoky Mountain Field School, has been leading Great Smokies foraging trips for more than thirty years—long before wild ramps and oyster mushrooms popped up all over foodies' Instagrams. She knows how to brewan aromatic tea from spice bush twigs and can point out broad-leaved plantain, a traditional remedy for snakebite. Spicebush tea is delicious and worth a try, but fingers crossed, you'll never have a reason to put together a plantain poultice. Hatter is still on-and off-the trail, leading students into the sheltered nooks of the East Tennessee backcountry to learn to identify edible plants and plumb the traditional medicinal uses handed down by old mountain men and "granny women." Administered under the University of Tennessee-Knoxville's Conferences & Non-Credit Programs office, each Foraging for Food & Farmacy event is an all-day boots-onthe-ground exploration of the hidden treasures of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The June program explores a portion of the Appalachian Trail, and the August wildcrafting event highlights the season's vield of edible mushrooms.

aceweb.outreach.utk.edu







SOUTHERN AGENDA



DRINKS

Texas

SPIRITS ON THE RISE

Kentucky and Tennessee have long dominated the Southern whiskey market, but the up-and-coming Texas spirit industry is hot on their heels. "I'll be damned if we're not putting out some of the best whiskey on the planet from a whiskey region that's the age of an eighth grader," writes Nico Martini in his new book, Texas Whiskey, the first major volume on the Texas whiskey industry. While researching the book, Martini visited nearly forty distilleries, including Balcones Distilling in Waco, which released the very first Texas whiskey just twelve years ago. "The biggest thing is the sheer lack of historical precedent," he says. "There is no history to guide what Texas whiskey is supposed to be, so everyone can be creative with how they approach it." Blackland Distillery in Fort Worth, for instance, uses a high-tech, fully automated still that completely standardizes the distillation process and the final product. Gulf Coast Distillers in Houston uses Texas grains, water, and yeast in what will soon be the largest production facility west of the Mississippi River. Already, bottles from the state have racked up high honors: Ironroot in Denison took home the World Whiskies Award for best bourbon in 2020. "It's going to be unbelievable what the state will be producing in ten years," Martini says. "Creativity will be our trademark."

texaswhiskey.org

OUTDOORS

Virginia

HOPE FLOATS

It's a different kind of work these days, but a pair of traditional Chesapeake Bay round-stern dead-rise boats have been restored and pressed into service on the lower Rappahannock River, thanks to a lifelong friendship between two Bay natives. Richard Moncure and Nate Parker purchased two of the classic wooden commercial fishing work boats and opened Rappahannock Roundstern to offer fishing, oystering, bald eagle watching, and history-oriented trips out of the lower Rappahannock. The 371/2-foot vessels, named for the hull's steep V shape and the rounded stern that made it easier to handle oyster tongs and fishing nets, were built in the fifties and sixties, part of a vanishing fleet of Chesapeake working craft. "Nate and I literally watched these icons of the Bay nearly disappear right before our eyes," says Moncure, a middle-school science teacher who worked as a river steward for Friends of the Rappahannock. "Now we use them to get people out there to touch the Bay for themselves, to feel it, smell it, and even taste it."

■ rappahannockroundstern.com

OPENING

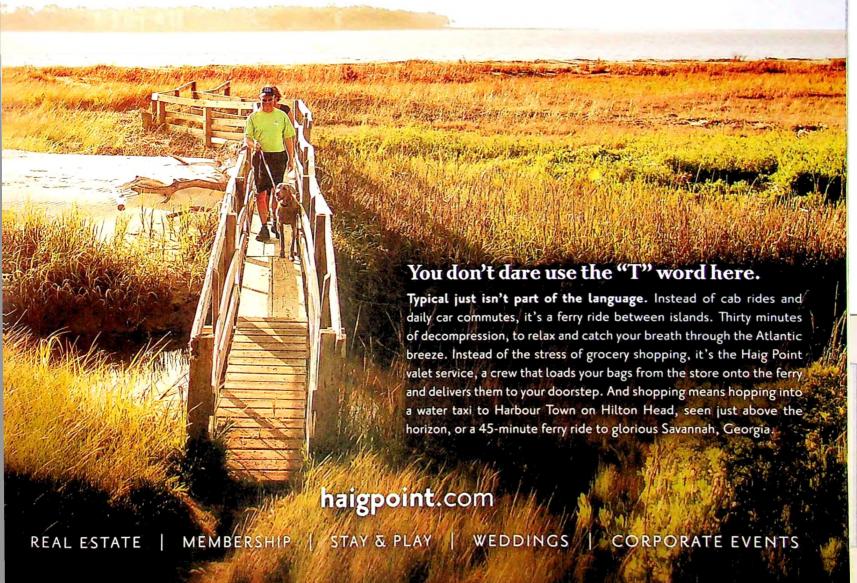
Washington, D.C.

A NEW PAGE

Upon its completion in 1972, Washington, D.C.'s Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library was the first major building to be named for King after his assassination. But for all its symbolism, "for many decades, the building wasn't really living up to its potential," says Richard Reyes-Gavilan, the DC Public Library executive director, who spearheaded a three-year renovation. A ribbon cutting last fall celebrated the updates, but because of the pandemic, library members hope to get a first look this summer-just in time for the library system's



- THE MAINLAND BEHIND -



SOUTHERN AGENDA

125th anniversary this year. Bright reading rooms replace dim stacks, and visitors will find a 290-seat auditorium and a rooftop garden. Two vestibule murals by DC Public Schools teacher Nekisha Durrett flank the entrance: One side depicts King giving a speech at nearby Cardozo High School in 1967, and the other shares a collage of modern Cardozo student activists, crafted entirely out of old protest buttons. "This is a place where books are really important," Reyes-Gavilan says. "But they're just one part of the library's story."

dclibrary.org

CONSERVATION

West Virginia

BIDING THEIR TIME

Great Eastern Brood cicadas take patience to a whole new level: They spend seventeen years underground before bursting up from the earth by the billions within a two-week period in late May or June when the soil warms to a balmy sixty-four degrees. "When they come up in these numbers, they satiate every predator-every bird, every rodent, every fish feeds until it can't eat one more cicada," says Matt Kasson, who teaches forest pathology at West Virginia University in Morgantown. The remaining cicadas mate, lay eggs in trees, and promptly die; by the end of June they'll begone, their corpses providing a welcome nitrogen boost to the soil. Meanwhile, the white and rice-grain-like nymphs hatch, tumble to the ground, and use special digging legs to burrow underground. There, they attach to tree roots ("they tap into a root system like a college kid taps into a keg of beer") and count exactly seventeen sap cycles. The greater D.C. area is expected to be one of this summer's Great Eastern Brood epicenters, but in West Virginia, they will emerge in the eastern panhandle, where Kasson promises you'll catch their buzz.

cicadamania.com

--Kinsey Gidick, Lindsey Liles, CJ Lotz, T. Edward Nickens, Caroline Sanders, and Dacey Orr Sivewright

Five Can't-Miss Southern Roadside Landmarks

You don't even have to leave your car to see some of the region's quirklest oddities

By Caroline Sanders



SA-211 Rocket

Elkmont, AL In the 1960s and 70s, NASA built more than a dozen Saturn 1B rockets for the Apollo program's orbital training missions. One of those rockets, the SA-211. never launched, and it now towers 224 feet over the Ardmore Welcome Center on I-65, three miles from the Tennessee border.

Betsy the Lobster

Islamorada, FL Sculptor Richard Blaze spent five years constructing Betsy, a forty-foot-long, thirty-foot-tall fiberglass spiny lobster complete with a spiky carapace and

spindly antennae. She guards the entrance to the Rain Barrel artist village on the Florida Keys' Overseas Highway in Islamorada.

Big Chicken

Marietta, GA

When a seven-story steel chicken sculpture was erected atop Johnny Reb's Chick-Chuck-'N'-Shake in 1963, the mechanisms were so shoddy that when the beak opened and the eyes rolled for the first time, the restaurant's windows shattered. The Big Chicken now crowns a KFC on Cobb Parkway and functions smoothly, and it remains a Mariettalandmark.

Peachoid

Gaffney, SC With a seven-ton leaf and a surface painted to mimio fuzz, the Peachoid, a 135 foot water tower erected in 1981, can be seen for miles down I-85 and is big enough to hold one million gallons.

Big Boots

San Antonio, TX Apair of thirty-five-foot-tall faux ostrich-skin-andcalfskin boots has marked the entrance to North Star Mall since 1980. Designer Bob "Daddy-O" Wade claimed the boots can hold 300,000 gallons of beer, although that theory has yet to be proved.



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Read about High Hampton on page 141 of this issue.

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JUNE JULY 2021

GARDENGGUN Field Report a resource for the BEST EVENTS. EXCURSIONS, AND PROMOTIONS

SIGNATURE EVENTS

Mark your calendar for these upcoming Garden & Gun experiences



A Kentucky Bourbon Affair

September 9 · Atlanta, Georgia Join us at the Garden & Gun Club in Atlanta for an exclusive dinner celebrating Bourbon Heritage Month Hosted in partnership with Louisville Tourism, the evening features craft bourbon cocktails and tastings from Kentucky's finest distillers, as well as a complementary menu by executive chef Ann Kim.



Cast & Blast

September 10-12 · Lake Charles, Louisiana For the third year, G&G joins the Lake Charles CVB to celebrate the best of the sporting life at Grosse Savanne Lodge in Lake Charles, Louisiana During the opening weekend of teal season, revel in three days of unparalleled hunting and fishing in this sportsman's paradise.



G&G Society Weekend

September 23-26 · Cashiers, North Carolina Accompany G&G editors and friends of the magazine on an exclusive retreat in Cashiers, North Carolina Throughout the weekend, Garden & Gun Society members can enjoy local spirits and cuisine, worldclass golf, shooting, and fly fishing, and lush accommodations at the iconic and newly renovated High Hampton



9th Annual Shoot

October 9 · Adairsville, Georgia

G&G's ninth annual sporting clays tournament features an unforgettable day in the field, followed by bites and cocktails. at the awards ceremony. This year's shoot takes place at Barnsley Resort, a historic estate north of Atlanta with a world-class shooting facility created in partnership with the iconic Beretta brand



G&G Adventure in Bermuda

October 21-24 · Bermuda

This fall, G&G is partnering with the Bermuda Tourism Authority to host a oneof-a-kind retreat. Throughout the weekend, guests will take in Bermuda's natural beauty through the lens of conservation, exploring the island by water and land and indulging in local food and drink alongside G&G editors and staff.

G&G PARTNER EVENTS

JUNE 21-27

SAZERAC COCKTAIL WEEK

FOR MORE, ITSIT GARDENANDGUN.COM/EVENTS

New Orleans & Virtual

This year, the city of New Orleans kicks off the first Sazerac Cocktail Week in celebration of the legendary sip. Folks across the country will perfect their mixing technique, aided by a virtual cocktail class on June 23. In the Big Easy, festivities include special tours and tastings at the historic Sazerac House, just steps from where the cocktail rose to popularity in the 1850s. For more information, visit SazeracCocktailWeek.com

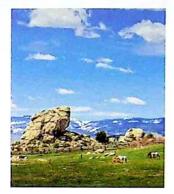
JUNE/JULY 2021

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G&G FIELD REPORT

FIELD REPORT DESTINATIONS

A guide to adventures in the South and beyond



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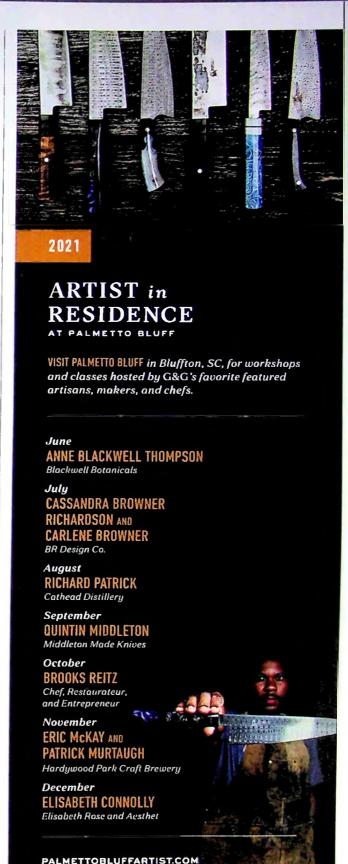
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BY ROY BLOUNT JR.

Hogwash!

GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF A LINGUISTIC TROUGH

R

ecently, while surfing that ocean of folderol we call the web, I got hung up on this particular bit of poppycock: that Al Capp, in his comic strip *Li'l Abner*, coined the word *hogwash*.

Baloney. *Hogwash* goes back to fifteenth-century Britain. First it meant semi-liquid pig-swill, then bad liquor, and then, a jumble of words.

That messy history has produced a finetuned compound. *Hog* for down-and-dirty, wash for euphemism. With subverbal notes of ugh and splash, of slush and gag.

Claptrap,twaddle,balderdash,bullfeathers, hooey, bosh, humbug, drivel, malarkey, hokum, piffle, flapdoodle, rot—not one of these carries the authority of hogwash.

Canwe claim hogwash for the South? We know that the origin of bunkum, or bunk for short, is Southern. One day in 1820, Rep. Felix Walker of North Carolina embarked upon a long, pointless speech. Cries arose to "cut it short!" Sorry, responded Walker. He had to issue such blather for consumption in his home county: "I shall not be speaking to the House, but to Buncombe."

Li'l Abner was set in Dogpatch, Capp's conception of an Appalachian town. There the muddy, voluptuous Moonbeam Mc-Swine slept with hogs. So did, on Hee Haw, the semiconsciously epigrammatic Junior

Samples. (Questioned as to the inefficiency of lifting a pig to eat apples from the tree, Junior responded, "What's time to a pig?"). But the noted British observer Fanny Trollope, in her *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, focused on porkers of the lower Midwest: "It seems hardly fair to quarrel with a place because its staple commodity is not pretty," wrote Trollope, "but I am sure I should have liked Cincinnati much better if the people had not dealt so very largely in hogs."

To which Cincinnatians of the day may well have responded, "La-di-da, Miss Fanny Trollope." (Did she *know*?) But that is a matter for Ohio.

We associate the novelist Willa Cather with Western plains. But she was born in Virginia, of Southern folks. In her *O Pioneers!*, one character suggests to another, "Why don't you go over there some afternoon and hog-tight her fences?"

"Ah," I thought at first glance, "courtship in old Nebraska." No doubt some upstanding countrywoman has resisted her neighbor's attempts at romance, and a mutual friend is proposing he loosen the lady's heart by, ironically, tightening her defenses—to where her hogs can't root up from under.

But no. The lady's hogs have been getting into our man's wheat. Rather than gripe about it, the friend suggests, it would pay for him to improve her fences.

"I keep my hogs home," he says. "Other peoples can do like me."

We could extrapolate a lot of politics from that exchange. But back to the question of whether *hogwash* is Southern.

Mark Twain, a Missourian, was Southern at least to this extent: He was conceived in Tennessee (if you do the math), and he served, for two weeks, as a Confederate volunteer. The Oxford English Dictionary credits him with introducing hogwash, in the sense of codswallop, to America. In 1870 he wrote: "In California, that land of felicitous nomenclature, the literary name of this sort of stuff is 'hogwash."

Californian, then? But hold on. In 1906 Twain wrote that *hogwash* had been invented (as a jocular description of Twain's writing) by a coworker at a newspaper in Virginia City, Nevada. And in 1908, for his *Autobiography*, Twain identified that coworker as Howard P. Taylor, "a Southerner." Aha!

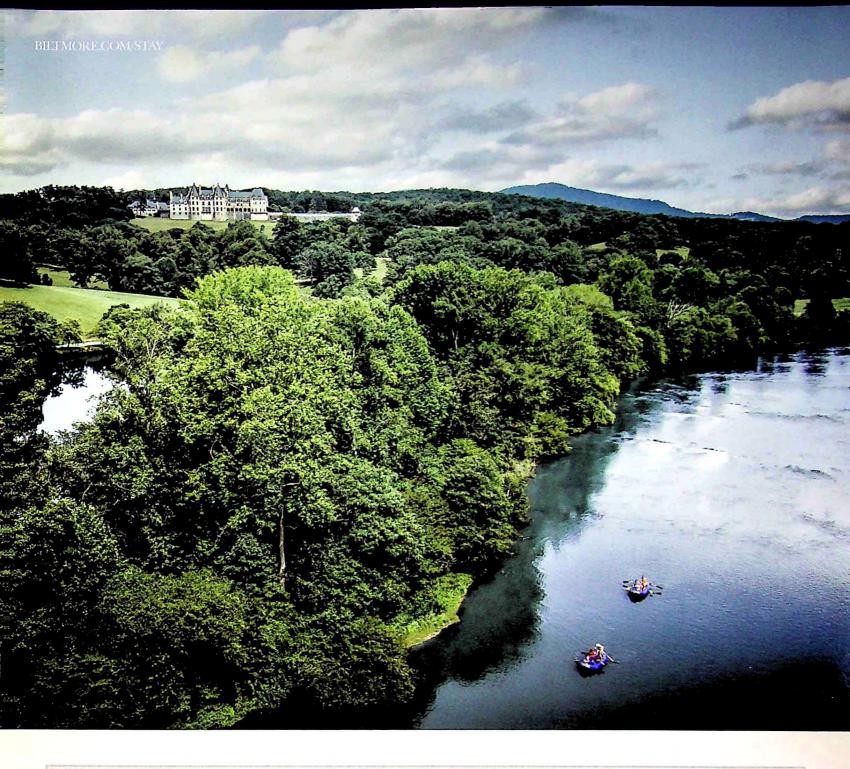
Further research: Taylor was from Louisville. Has the case of *hogwash* as Southern been hog-tighted?

Hold on, again. Long after his Nevada days, Twain was reunited, to his delight, with his old buddy Taylor. The delight began to ebb as Twain brought up their adventures in Virginia City and Taylor responded with utterly un-overlapping escapades in, of all places, Keokuk, Iowa. Neither man recognized the other's memories. "Who are you?" Twain wondered to himself. "Who am I?...It looks to me as if it is neither of us."

Surely the old magic word would get themtogether: "How would you like," Twain ventured, "to have some hog-wash now?" The reference "fell so flat that I could hear itslap the floor... I have never seen a person look blanker than he did. He didn't look the kind of blankness that would indicate that he had forgotten about hog-wash, it was the kind of uncompromising blankness which indicated that he had never heard of hogwash before in his life."

Another word for a jumble of words: nostalgia. ©

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